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SEPTEMBER, 1956

OPERATION DISASTER!

by Darius John Granger



SEPTEMBER 1956

Imaginative Tales

ALL STORIES
NEW AND
COMPLETE

William L. Humling
Editor

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The Editorial.....

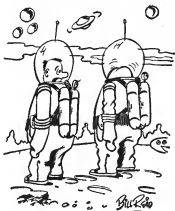
DON'T look now, but when the first rocket leaves the Earth's atmosphere and journeys into outer space, it's going to cost whoever sends that rocket a pretty penny. That is, it will cost whatever the property owner out there lays claim to.

RIDICULOUS, you think? Not so. A very enterprising chap in Evergreen Park, Illinois has filed a claim on outer space—calling his vast territory "Celestia"—and this claim has been registered officially in the archives of the Recorder of Cook County, state of Illinois. In addition, the new "owner" of space has forwarded documents to every nation on the face of the Earth—including application for entry into the United Nations.

THE far-seeing real estate magnate behind "Celestia" is John T. Mangan (address: 3600 W. 96th St., Evergreen Park, Ill.) and if you doubt that this is indeed a serious project, write to him % *The Nation of Celestial Space* at the above address. You will no doubt receive his well-produced REPORT TO THE UNIVERSE white paper which outlines the history of his project.

ONE can't help but wonder about the ramifications of an idea such as this officially put into execution. If indeed the courts of the

land (or the world) recognize property legally registered, then it would appear that Mr. Mangan will have quite a case to put through the courts should anybody infringe upon his rather awesome domain. If Mr. Mangan is indeed wise, he is even now preparing his brief, for it will not be long ere claim jumpers are crossing his borders. Thus far no toll fee has been mentioned, but considering the area to be traversed, "Celestia" will be entitled to a respectable fee! Watch out for this boy Mangan. He may turn out to be First Governor of the Solar System! Right now it looks like it's all his! wth



"Drop something, Thompson?"

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OPERATION DISASTER!

by

Darius John Granger

Mark Channing's name was hated throughout the starways; oddly, it was because of this that he must face death to help a doomed alien world!

MARK CHANNING first saw the Operation Disaster starship from the interurban helicopter which ferried him from Omaha to the starfield. Down below as they hovered, the starship was a big beetle shape reflecting the silver-blue of the

sky. Mark Channing gazed in awe-struck wonder: he had seen the interplanetary spaceships many times before, the slender, projectile-shaped vessels which plied the orbital spacelanes of the solar system. But he had never seen a really big ship like the Operation Disaster starship before.

Operation Disaster!

It had to be big. It was Operation Disaster, wasn't it? It was a ship too ponderous, too massive for the frequent atmosphere thrusts of interplanetary traveling; it was an interstellar ship. And it would take Mark Channing across two thousand light years of space - - really deep space - - to a planet he had never seen, circling a star that was invisible from Earth except through telescopes. Suddenly, Mark sobered, thinking that soon that star *would* become visible - - catastrophically - - although thanks to the finite speed of light Earth wouldn't see the effects for two thousand years.

Then Mark was swept up in the excitement of landing, of walking swiftly across the glazed expanse of the starfield while the eyes of the helicopter's more mundane passengers, those bound for merely interplanetary destinations, were riveted on him, of approaching the Operation Disaster starship from the ground and truly seeing for the

first time its enormous size, of making his way through the scurrying jumper-clad ground crew and to the entry-ramp, of climbing the ramp and all at once squaring his shoulders because he was Anson Channing's son and Anson Channing had perished, when Mark was an infant, on a previous Operation Disaster flight to the very same planet; of being swallowed by the huge maw of the starship and gazing in wonderment at the almost cavernous interior of the vessel that would take him across the gulf of deep space in the footsteps of his dead father

"You're Mark Channing, aren't you?" a rasping voice called from nearby.

Mark blinked against the unexpectedly fierce light coming from the storage hatches to the left of the catwalk that would take him rearship to the specialist quarters, and saw a short, gnarled man with an incredible breadth of shoulders and a face carved, it seemed, from the craggy bedrock of a planet, and a shock of vivid orange hair beginning to gray in streaks. The man had a chest to match his shoulders and was bare-chested and sweaty and leathery-looking. Mark took him for a work-gang boss and said, "Yes, I'm Channing. But I'm sorry, I don't think we've met."

"Otto Spade," rasped the man with the craggy face, the giant's torso and the unexpectedly spindley legs. "Your dad and me were great friends. I'd have known that face anywhere, Mark. You look like your old man."

"You knew Anson Channing?" Mark asked, astonished. The mere acquaintance did not astonish him: it was Otto Spade's attitude. For Spade was friendly, wasn't he? Had Mark ever met anyone directly connected with Operation Disaster work before who had been friendly when informed that Mark was the dead Anson Channing's son? Mark shook his head: the answer was no.

"Knew him?" said Otto Spade, coming nimbly to the catwalk and gripping Mark's hand powerfully. His voice was both friendly and defiant. "Hell, yes, I knew Anson Channing, and a better man never left Earth for deep space!"

MARK FELT his eyes fill, and hated himself for his inability to control his emotions.

"You really mean that?" Mark asked tremulously.

"You've got a million things to do, boy," Otto Spade replied. "You don't want to chew the rag with a crewman now. You're from the Academy, a specialist - -"

"There isn't anybody I'd rather

talk to - -"

"Well, a word of advice, son. I haven't kept secret my feelings about Anson Channing and I don't think you ought to give folks a chance to start thinking Anson Channing's son has no use for anybody but the old man's cronies. You understand?"

"Yes, but - -"

"Besides, I'm crew and you're specialist and crew and specialists don't mix."

"But - - but weren't you crew when you knew my dad?"

"I came out of the Academy, just like you," Otto Spade said, his voice still rasping impersonally but a wistful look sweeping momentarily across his eyes. "Forty years ago, it was. I served fifteen years in deep space as an Operation Disaster agent with your father, boy. Then they tore up my license."

"But why?" Mark gasped.

Otto Spade answered the question with another. "Why did your father die?"

"I don't know!" Mark cried. "I know what they say, but - -"

Spade asked abruptly: "Is that why you're going to Purname?"

"You ought to know better than that!" Mark flushed hotly. "The Academy teaches you to be impersonal and objective, disavowing personal considerations in the face

of the goals of your Operation Disaster mission . . . ”

Spade smiled. “See what I mean? I was just making a point of it, boy. Personal considerations aren’t supposed to count, but your first moments aboard your first Operation Disaster ship are spent with someone who knew your father. How does that look to you?”

Mark turned away swiftly, stalking up the catwalk. Any answer he gave would be an admission of weakness. But before he’d gone three strides, Otto Spade’s big hand fell on his shoulder. “Only making a point, boy. You ought to know if you need a friend on your first assignment, I’m the man. But you ought to use your head about what I told you, too.”

“Yes,” Mark said. “Thank you.”

“And one more thing. Jamison’s child is on this ship, Mark.”

“Hurley Jamison? I - - I didn’t know he had any.”

“One child, trained in the Academy like you.”

“Funny, I never met - - ”

“You know how Hurley Jamison’s family feels about your old man.”

“I’ve heard.”

“Anson Channing was responsible for the Purnamese disaster, twenty years ago. That’s what they say.”

Mark clutched the misshapen man’s arm in a savage grip. “Was he?”

“I don’t think so,” Otto Spade said evenly. “But maybe you’ll find out - - on Purname.” Then, abruptly, he turned back to the loading crew, convicts, mostly, from the nearby penal institution. “All right, you lazy, gold-bricking, earth-lubbing sons! Get your duffs back under those hauling nets, what you think we have, a whole sidereal year to do the job? Get a move”

THE RASPING voice faded and disappeared in the general noise of loading, the creaking of booms and winches, the metallic ring of magnet-shod feet as the ground crew swarmed all over the starship’s hull, checking every last wire of the intricate cybernetics control unit. The hum of a hundred voices merged to give a hundred sets of orders, the shuffling of sneaker-clad convict feet loading the ship; convicts who would make up its crew because free men did not want to give up a year of their life each way on the long interstellar voyage, unless they were dedicated men like the Operation Disaster agents.

Mark followed the catwalk to the rear of the ship, and here everything was different. Mark saw

several lounging figures, passing the final few minutes before blast-off and the long sleep in small talk or a final drink or two. Mark recognized none of the faces: naturally, there wouldn't be more than a handful of first year men like himself aboard the starship. There was no bustle of last-minute preparations in the agent-quarters of the starship: after a final hour or so of waiting the agents would bed down in their long-sleep hammocks, breathe the gas that would slow their metabolic rates almost to the point of death, and spend the year-long journey across deep space to Purname in suspended animation. Meanwhile, of course, the sleep-thinking machinery would be feeding them every tidbit of information they had to know about Purname and the Purnamese situation. They would all be experts by the time they arrived, and it would be as if only a restful night of sleep had elapsed.

Mark presented his credentials to one of the long-sleep technicians, an asthmatic-looking young fellow who seemed completely indifferent to Mark's name as he scrawled something on Mark's Form 15 card and said, "That will be section G, George, sir."

"Can I go to sleep any time?"

"Sure. Just strap yourself in and press the red button," the techni-

cian said, looking puzzled. "Most of the agents like to see the blast-off, though. You're allowed. Then they like to talk and drink and have a little party before they sleep a year of their lives away. And usually, they have to be coaxed to bed. But you - -"

"Thanks for the information," Mark said gruffly, and was immediately sorry. The young fellow had merely been expressing his amazement, and that was natural enough. Mark wasn't going to tell him that he had nothing in common with the other agents, who probably thought of him - - if they thought of him at all - - as the son of a pariah.

Mark left the technician and walked across a salon toward a companionway door marked *E-H Sleeping quarters*. Half a dozen agents lounged in the salon, talking and drinking. Occasional soft laughter came to Mark's ears. Music was playing softly and a couple of the agents, a tall man and a short, stocky woman, were dancing. One of those lounging around with drinks in their hands, Mark noticed, was also a girl.

The music became muted, the lights dimmed, and a voice sang:

Polaris to Antares,

My love, my love, he's

A rovin' man!

It was a refrain from the Milky

Way Blues, and Mark saw the dancing couple kiss quickly and glide off into the shadows in one corner of the salon. The music swelled in volume as Mark approached the companionway door, his loneliness clinging to him like a sodden cloak. And a voice called: "Channing!"

HE WHIRLED. The voice seemed to draw him back to the world. Someone was striding toward him through the dimness. It was the second girl, the one who had been lounging in a small group of agents, talking and sipping a drink. She was young, Mark saw, and looked pretty in the dim light. He thought her hair was auburn: no, he amended that, copper-colored. Her face was in shadow, but had lovely contours. He was quite sure he had never seen her before.

"In a hurry to sleep?" she asked him. Her voice was soft, almost melodious, yet Mark got the impression she was baiting him.

"Have to get it over with sooner or later," he said. "I don't know you, do I?"

The girl said, still softly, "I know you. I'd know that face anywhere. You look so like the pictures I've seen of your father."

Mark smiled. "You're the second person who's told me that aboard

ship."

The girl's voice changed almost to a whisper as she came very close to him and said, "I hope the first one was a man. I hope he punched you in the face. I hope he hurt you."

"What - - " Mark gasped.

The girl went on. "Hasn't one Channing done enough damage in the Operation Disaster Corps? Hasn't one Channing caused enough trouble on Purname already?"

Mark replied harshly. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"What you really mean is you'd rather not face it. Did you think anybody wanted you at the Academy, Channing?"

"I did my work."

"Your work! Your father wasn't exactly a credit to the Corps, was he?"

"Why do you hate him so?" Mark asked suddenly. "You're no older than I am. You couldn't have known him. You couldn't possibly know the real story of what happened on Purname twenty years ago, since no one does. You - - "

"Everyone knows the real story, Channing. Except you."

"The real story!" Mark cried hotly. "The story old Hurley Jamison left in his notes, you mean. But everyone knew old man Jamison hated my father for some rea-

son, everyone knew Jamison's story couldn't be relied on, everyone knew - - "

"Hurley Jamison didn't hate your father any more or less than any other loyal Corpsman. And he wasn't an old man when he died. Don't speak of him like that. He was a young man with dreams and visions and hopes. He - - never mind about him. But he knew, as everyone else knows now, that your father violated the code of Operation Disaster by - - "

"By trying to save a people too mixed up to save itself!" yelled Mark.

"Stop shouting. They're looking at you. I was saying," she went on coldly, "everyone knows your father violated the code of Operation Disaster by meddling in the Purnamese religious beliefs and finally making them rise up and kill the entire expedition."

"That's hearsay! And besides, the Purnamese *were* evacuated to their outermost planet twenty years ago, as they had to be. Don't you see," Mark said, almost pleading, "that the Purnamese situation is a cosmic irony. The Purnamese are sun-worshippers - - and their sun is destroying them."

"I only know what I learned in the Academy. Have you forgotten that, already?"

"No, but sometimes a man has

to act according to the dictates of his own reason, even if he violates - - "

"Like your father?"

"Like my father, yes."

"No matter who it hurts - - who it kills?"

Mark did not answer. He wished suddenly that the year of sleep, not yet begun, was over - - wished that they had reached Purname where, maybe, he would find some real answers.

"I said, no matter who it hurts and kills?"

Still Mark did not answer.

"I'm Susan Jamison," the girl said.

MARK OPENED the companionway door and rushed through before it had irised fully open. He heard the shutter-like sound of the door closing behind him, and began to run. The music, the Milky Way Blues, rang in his ears. It was being piped all over the ship.

Drink to the rover

On the radar track.

He'll never come back . . .

Anson Channing had never come back. Hurley Jamison had never come back. A whole expedition, there on far Purname, had perished. Except for Otto Spade, who wasn't talking. Otto Spade, who had drifted free of the wreck of a world,

like Melville's Ishmael

With Hurley Jamison's logbook. What hatred had been kindled between the two men, his father and the girl's father, both dead now, on far Purname? wondered Mark. Hatred to make Jamison lie - -

If Jamison had been lying Because let's face it, Mark, you don't know, you can't be sure.

Mark found his compartment, rushed inside, and was hardly aware of the cramped, antiseptic quarters, the single hard-looking hammock, the machine hovering over it, the sleep-thinker. He dropped, emotionally exhausted, to the hammock. With trembling fingers he fastened the straps, which allowed him some digital freedom - - just enough to activate the machinery which would put him to sleep. Mark took a deep breath, wondered what it was like to sleep uninterrupted for a whole year (It was a little like dying, he had been told, but you dreamed a lot, thanks to the sleep-thinker), and touched the red button with his fingertip. A cone of dazzling light swooped down.

The music was syncopated and the voice wailed the blues:

Sagittarius!

Delerious!

He'll never come back

Mark Channing was asleep an hour before the Operation Disas-

ter starship left Earth for sub-space and Purname.

CHAPTER II

. . . . nightmares and learning.

. . . . every cubic mile of deep space, not empty space, for no space is truly empty, a single hydrogen atom is being spontaneously created every mili-second. This keeps the universe going, growing, expanding. (Maybe monsters are out there: picture of a monster, many-fanged and sleep disturbing, created spontaneously like a hydrogen atom from void and darkness. Silent screaming like a vivid splash of the color red. Blood and horror.)

. . . . main sequence stars. But if a star moves slowly through the gas clouds of space, and we do not know why this should be, so except that some stars do move slowly, others rapidly (vision of stars rushing and flashing, others crawling and bumbling along)

. . . . if a star moves slowly, it digs a wider tunnel through the gas of space, the gaseous material thus lifted from deep space falling into the star itself, adding over the eons to the star's bulk until it becomes enormous, bloated, dazzlingly bright, a supergiant. (Parade of supergiant stars: Deneb, Rigel, Canopus.) And the super-

giant thus formed, a star many thousands of times brighter than Sol, is a rare and beautiful object, but a foredoomed one. (Death-beds and death-masks of supergiants, dirging the Milky Way Blues.)

. . . . fifty billion years, for that is the life-expectancy of a main sequence star like Sol which, as the eons pass, will contract, grow hotter, whiter, become a white dwarf, then fade, a red dwarf, an ember, a cinder, a black dwarf, lightless, without heat, leading its family of dead planets through the eternal vaults of darkness. (Earth, dying. Earth, dead. Proud Earth. Gone its life, its teeming cities. Gone rain and seasons and warmth and the sounds of the world. A cosmic speck, but it means so much to man. Still, fifty billion years is a great time, even astrophysically, for the galaxy of which Sol is a member is not yet more than five billion years old.)

. . . . supergiants perish cataclysmically. We call their final death throes supernovae. Such stellar explosions have been seen from Earth. (The Christmas Star. Vision of the Three Wise Men, following, following a sky-beacon at night, bright as the moon. Tycho's Star. The great supernova recorded by the Chinese in the eleventh century.) For a period of

several Earth days, the light, heat and other radiation given off by a sundered supergiant - - a supernova - - equals that given off by all ten billion stars in this galaxy.

Purname's sun, soon after your arrival, will go supernova.

. . . . white dwarf first, contracting but becoming dazzlingly bright. Soon the supergiant is reduced in size to almost planetary dimensions, as it caves in on itself because it has exhausted its hydrogen but continues to radiate fiercely. Transmutation of heavier elements. (The alchemist's stone of medieval sorcerers, lead to gold.) But such fusion, unlike hydrogen to helium (picture of a hydrogen bomb, heavy water to helium and a big blow) does not release great quantities of energy. It absorbs them. And grows fantastically massive until a cubic inch of its interior must weigh a billion tons.

. . . . eons of time. Then, suddenly, time speeds up. The supergiant, now an unstable dwarf, emits much hard radiation into space, along with light and heat. In the last stage, as with the Purnamese sun, the massiveness and absorption of energy suddenly reaches a critical point. The resulting explosion, flinging the hot central core of the collapsed supergiant into space, is the most awe-

some of cosmic spectacles and will, naturally, instantly vaporize any planets the star might possess.

(Purname, fifth of the name. For your people have moved outward in successive stages from the first planet to the fifth, as your sun's heat increased in the last stages of its catastrophic collapse. Purname, Earth's sister, with your seas and forests and the sounds and smells of life. Your oceans won't boil, Purname. Grim bubbling brine never touching sandy shores. In a snapping of cosmic fingers, before boiling or melting of your bedrock, Purname, you will be gone. Snuffed out in the greatest explosion the universe has ever seen or will ever see.)

Supernova!

. . . . the Purnamese function of Operation Disaster. Strangely, the Purnamese were able to make the first three moves on their own. In great migration fleets they deserted their too-hot first planet for the second, then for the third, then for the fourth. But all the efforts of their culture, all the splendid creativity of a race equal to Earth's, went into this desperate undertaking. As a result, Purnamese culture deteriorated. Hardly more than savages now. (Drums and chants, he'll never come back, hot throb of a jungle pulse beat.) Operation Disaster, earth contingent, moved

the Purnamese twenty years ago from their fourth to their fifth planet. (Deserted ghost of a fleet now, circling Purname, fifth of the name, like Saturn's ring. Empty ghost ships, waiting, waiting, to save the people who built you, beyond saving themselves. Barbaric. Worshipping the sun which soon will destroy them.)

. . . . dangerously hot environment. Jungle rot and deserts and oceans uncomfortably warm last minute arrival of Operation Disaster rescue ship agents, specialists to activate Purname's waiting evacuation fleet, to put the Purnamese in suspension sleep until a new home can be found for them, to evacuate them in time, evacuate them before the big blow

Supernova!

. . . . wiped out, but for one man. Religious war again a possibility if memory of Anson Channing, who played a deity. (Father whom I do not know! Father and a god for the Purnamese, you died so they might live, father, didn't you?) possibly they might have forgotten entirely no longer civilized in fear and superstitious dread sun-worshippers, worshipping in fear, not love

Nightmares and learning. Jungle rites and a dead man, head split

open, familiar man, dead man, father of my dreams, Purname sun-god embodied. Screaming and chanting and the march on the aliens who have taken us in ships our patriarchs say we ourselves have built . . . no gods! alien lies! tricks! kill them!

Purname

Two hundred million inhabitants . . . the safety factor, for the core of Purname's sun, gone supernova, will be flung into space at a speed of five million miles an hour. Flee with them or without them, but flee in time to save yourselves . . . another tragedy like the Channing affair . . . murder of five hundred Earthmen by extra-terrestrial savages . . . close Operation Disaster Academy and put an end to mankind's most worthy interstellar efforts . . . must not happen.

Nightmares and learning - - and the pan-humanity dream of the founders of Operation Disaster:

Fact. If a collapsed supergiant and another star form a binary system, and if the collapsed supergiant explodes, some of its material (containing the necessary transmutations into heavier elements of which a main sequence star is not composed) will remain behind and, after eons, become a planetary system for the stable star.

Fact. This has happened per-

haps ten million times in the Milky Way Galaxy.

Fact. At least one in ten of these planetary births should have produced a planet similar to Earth. Purname, sister

Fact. One million planets, scattered in a million stellar planetary systems in the galaxy, which can support life as we know it.

Fact. If a planet can support life, the biologists tell us, life probably will rise.

Fact. Darwin's natural selection. There are obvious advantages of walking upright and carrying the brain several feet off the ground, in a thick-walled cranium, and having binocular eyes and two arms and opposable thumbs. Mankind, then, is not unique.

Fact. Purname and a dozen other planets prove this. Some day, we'll find them all. That is our job, our dedication, our life. And some of them need our help. Desperately, like Purname. Operation Disaster was born and will do its work until the dream of pan-humanity becomes a possibility and a reality across the sixty thousand light years of the Milky Way galaxy.

Mark Channing slept and dreamed and learned and aspired.

And finally, awoke.

IN THE FORWARD observation lounge of the Operation Disaster starship, they said, "So that's Purname. Hard to believe it's going to be vaporized instantly in about a month. Why, it doesn't even look to be so hot: it's all covered with cloud."

And they said, "The intense heat causes faster water evaporation. It's hot all right. And so damned wet that leather begins to rot as soon as you expose it down there. At least, it did on the last expedition."

And they said, marveling over the fact that they had slept a year and, sleeping, learned, "I don't feel any older. Do I look any older? One year. One year out of my life."

And they made jokes about Rip Van Winkle and other long sleeps - - snoozes, they said - - in legend and story. They were generally gay, but it was a nervous gaiety as they watched cloud shrouded Purname sweep up at them from the blackness of space.

Mark Channing was there in the observation lounge, alone. He hardly thought of his isolation at all now: he had been lonely all his life and never even thought that if he'd undertaken any career but extra-terrestrial anthropologist he could have lived normally. There had never been any doubt, though:

he would follow in his father's footsteps. And so he would be alone.

The starship rushed into Purname's soupy atmosphere and white tendrils of fog became thick gray banks of fog and soon nothing but the fog could be seen through the viewport. There was much drinking, but no music now. A mechanical voice called suddenly:

CAPTAIN MACCREADY IS NOW ENTERING THE LOUNGE.

The buzz of conversation faded and the lounge was completely silent when the door irised and Captain MacCready, a grizzled old space veteran and a giant of a man close to seven feet tall, who was in overall charge of the expedition and the crew, stalked into the lounge.

"I'm a spaceman," he boomed. "I'm no expert on extra-terrestrial anything - - except space. So, now that we've come to Purname and are soon to make planetfall, you might wonder what my job is. I'll tell you. I'm a kind of safety officer. It's my job to get you all back to Earth alive, when your work is done. It's my job to see that nothing foolhardy is attempted."

Someone asked, "Is what the expedition did last time - - foolhardy?"

"I think so," boomed MacCready

promptly. "Hell, yes."

"They saved the Purnamese."

"And died themselves, fellow."

Mark said, "They didn't come out here to sight-see, Captain. They had a mission to accomplish, and is there any man who can say they didn't accomplish it?" Immediately, he was sorry he had spoken. A man in Mark Channing's position should never seek the center of the stage.

"You're Channing, aren't you?" the Captain demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"His son?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wouldn't talk, Channing. What your father did caused the death of every member of the expedition but one."

"What my father did saved two hundred million Purnamese from certain death!" Mark answered hotly.

MacCready said, "Well, I'm not an Operation Disaster Academy man. I haven't been trained to think that extra-terrestrial lives are more important than Earth lives. So, if what you said is what every specialist aboard my ship thinks, I still have a crew to consider. A crew of Earthmen, Mr. Channing."

Mark thought, Earthmen. Convicts. Lifers, mostly. And, to earn a life sentence in the twenty-second century you had to be an habitual criminal of the worst sort.

A few dozen convict Earthmen, and two hundred million Purnamese men, women, and children, all as human as Earthmen.

Someone said that what Anson Channing's son said very definitely was not representative of what the rest of them thought. There was general agreement and, visibly, Captain MacCready relaxed. Then he said, "The reason I wanted to make my position clear is this. Just like the old days of terrestrial warfare, and I mean specifically during the target run of a big intercontinental bombing craft, when the bombardier took charge, the captain of the ship relinquishing control to him - - so it has to be with us, by law. Your Operation Disaster Director, Dr. Culcross, will be taking over as soon as we land on Purname. Dr. Culcross knows the native ways, and I don't. Dr. Culcross is an expert, and I'm only an astrogator. But I wanted to make my point clear first. I wanted to show where my sympathies lie. Are there any questions?"

THERE WERE NONE. Mark was thinking, Then why? why in space does he think he's taken us across two thousand light years? To turn tail at the first sign of trouble?

The expedition leader, Dr. Cul-

cross, was introduced. He was a small, bent, scholarly-looking old man and Mark thought that MacCready purposely stood by his side to point up the contrast. Dr. Culcross spoke in vague terms of the expedition's mission, of the tradition behind the O. D. Agents, of the interstellar brotherhood of humanity which was the dream of Operation Disaster. Then he got down to cases, saying, "An expedition of this sort, naturally, is made up of specialists in many fields. For a while, at least, most of you can take a holiday - - aboard ship. Our first foray will be made by the extra-terrestrial anthropologists and sociologists, who have been given, by the sleep-thinker, a thorough knowledge of what Purnamese culture was like twenty years ago. They must now correlate this learning with the facts as they stand today. Meanwhile - - " he chuckled - - "I wouldn't be averse to the rest of you sleep suspension experts, astrogators, rocket engineers, and the like, throwing a ship-wide party. There'll be plenty for you to do later, if the anthropology people tell us it's safe." He paused, nodded his head and looked up to ask, wordlessly, if there were any questions. Again, there were none. With Captain MacCready he turned on his heel and went through

the irising door.

And the microphone blared:

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND
SOCIOLOGISTS, FORWARD!

Mark's heart pounded up against his ribs as he made his way forward. His father had been an anthropologist specializing in the Purnamese sun-worshipping religion. He was the same. He went forward now for final instructions with the half dozen other social scientists aboard the starship. He noticed without surprise that Susan Jamison was one of them - - without surprise because her father, like Mark's, had been an anthropologist. She did not meet his eyes.

But on the catwalk leading forward, Otto Spade was waiting. He placed his heavy hand on Mark's shoulder and said quickly, in a soft voice which no one else heard, "Be careful, boy. Everyone on this ship, the convicts too, are watching you. You look too much like your old man, they say. You have his exact job. You - - be careful, Mark."

Mark challenged, "You never come out and say what you really think. But you were on Purname twenty years ago, weren't you? And you don't hate my father!"

"No, I don't."

"What he did was right. It had to be done, didn't it?"

Otto Spade did not answer, but

his big fingers squeezed Mark's shoulder and Mark knew he was trying to be friendly.

Then Spade said, scowling, "It's incredible how like your father you are."

After that, Mark filed forward with the others to receive his final briefing before planetfall on Purname.

CHAPTER IV

THE FACE of the Sun had changed.

Not the sun in the sky, the sun which was rarely seen these days, obscured by thick clouds - - but the sun atop the shrine in Purname City. The god-sun.

It was smaller, and brighter. The priests had made it that way, for hadn't the sky-sun itself, on the rare occasions when they saw it, become smaller and brighter?

The priests had coated the god-sun with darkness-glowing paint, and at night especially it was beautiful. At night also it was cooler and so they worshipped more frequently at night, but it was still chokingly hot even in the darkest, coolest hour of the night.

Mandit Karr, who was not a priest but a retired old warrior, often worshipped at night. Then, with the others of his faith - - and on Purname a man either had the

faith of the god-sun or no faith at all - - Mandit Karr would climb the terraces of the shrine, singing a thousand-year-old chant at each level, his gnarled old arms reaching upward and out as if somehow he could grab the image of his deity there atop the shrine, gleaming and serene, and merge himself with it. And then, at such times, when the efficacy of his lord, the sun, really reached him, his thoughts would go back across the years to a time when he was still a warrior, and Captain of a Hundred, a time in his strong middle years, when the god-sun had come down to Purname.

He stared raptly at such times at the image of his deity, his eyes filling with water either from the fierce glow or with memory of what had happened. Ch'nanq had come down to his people. Ch'nanq! Wasn't it written that, in times of trouble, Ch'nanq would alight on Purname in the guise of a mortal, of a young man from the sun's own domain, the sky? And hadn't Ch'nanq come thus? He had come, Mandit Karr thought bitterly, and had been slain, along with his sky-host, so that only one minor follower of the deity escaped. And this, Mandit Karr thought chokingly, bitterly, bleakly, after Ch'nanq and his followers had removed all that was left of man-

kind from its burning world - - the world was burning, doubtless, because Ch'nanq had not been worshipped properly, but Ch'nanq was a forgiving deity - - and deposited them safely on Purname (fifth of the name) in vessels which they themselves had built and forgotten how to use!

Ch'nanq! Glorious god-sun! Master of the sky, forgiving Ch'nanq!

Ch'nanq! the air grows hot and it chokes and the rains flood us in the lowlands, Ch'nanq! Of winter we know nothing now, and the spring and fall are lost in the fierce blaze of summer, tempered only by the flooding storms of the heavenly waters, of your wrath, Ch'nanq! But is it not written that you will return to us, oh Ch'nanq? Return in our time of desperate troubles and vouchsafe us another chance for survival, that we might prosper and sing a paean to your name? Is it not written so - - Ch'nanq!

Mandit Karr hobbled on his one leg to the next terrace of the shrine. He had lost his right leg from above the knee during the fighting and the riots after the coming of Ch'nanq. The words still rang in his ear - - terrible words. False god! they shouted in the streets and shrines of the new Purname City. False god! Bringer of ruin! Driver from homes! False god! And cry-

ing thus the crowds had formed in the streets of the new Purname City, and the soldiers, under Mandit Karr and others, had been powerless to stop them. Only one small spaceship, which had been within the belly of the bigger starship, had escaped. But its pilot had not been the god-sun Ch'nanq, for they had found the mortal shell of Ch'nanq's godhood, its head split from crown to jaw, its eyes open and staring and crawling with flies in the stifling heat.

But this, Mandit Karr told himself, had not been Ch'nanq. Ch'nanq - - with flies crawling in his sightless eyes? Ch'nanq, indeed! Wrathfully, Ch'nanq had returned to his home in the sky, had retired in his wrath behind the great banks of clouds, and hardly showed his face to the people anymore, but only let them feel his withering heat. Still, and Mandit Karr smiled serenely as he reached the topmost terrace and bathed in the light of his deity, the fact that Ch'nanq had not destroyed the world meant that his righteous wrath would subside and that someday he would smile again on his people.

For they hadn't forsaken him, not entirely. The shrines were still worshipped at, and the old chants sung. Ch'nanq, thou glorious! We

await your return in our time of troubles, Ch'nanq!

Slowly, on his one good leg and the peg, Mandit Karr began his descent on the other side of the shrine. Terrace by terrace he made his way down, pausing on each level to make his offering to the sun. The priests of the sun accepted his money, their claw-like hands jerking clear of the wide sleeves of their saffron robes, but he did not like the priests of the sun. It seemed incredible to him that the beliefs of a retired old soldier could be more in keeping with the traditions of their worship, but he knew it was so. And the priests, who did not really believe in Ch'nanq any more, not since the First Coming, accepted money in his name. But fortunately, Mandit Karr thought, there are others like myself . . .

There was yelling down below. Mandit Karr's ears - - not as sharp as they once had been - - became aware of it only when he reached the fifth terrace. Figures were rushing about in the hot still darkness, shouting. A babble of confusion, with one sound repeated over and over again.

Ch'nanq!

Ch'nanq has come!

MANDIT KARR rushed to the final terrace, and from it to

the ground. His heart was pounding, his limbs had become so weak they barely obeyed his whirling brain, and his breath was whistling in his throat. Ch'nanq!

Of course, he couldn't be sure. Whenever the name was mentioned, others hooted it down. And no, the crowd was not a jubilant throng awaiting the return of the deity. The crowd was loud, without humor, passionate and - - not entirely unexpectedly, Mandit Karr had to admit - - self-divided. There were some who rushed to the terraced shrine, attempting to tear down or at least deface the images. But others fought them off and sang the name of the god-sun. Blood flowed in the streets around the shrine even before Mandit Karr learned exactly what was happening.

"Fellow!" he said, collaring a stout sweating youth with his back to the first terrace of the shrine, defending it, "What has happened?"

"Ch'nanq!" wheezed the fat boy, and stuck his pudgy fist in another man's face.

"Ch'nanq, what?" Mandit Karr yelled.

"Has come again, some say," the fat boy told him, sweat streaming down his face as he lashed out with one thick leg and drove back a woman carrying a firebrand. "In

the Field of Sorrow, friend. Where he died the last time. I believe. I believe!" the boy screamed devoutly, and died as someone down below jumped, caught his legs, and ripped his abdomen across with a bone-handled dagger.

Mandit Karr leaped from the low terrace, for the first time in his advanced years forgetting the fact that he was but one-legged. He stumbled and fell and instantly the crowd trampled over him and he was forced, face down, into the ooze and mud of a hundred violent rain storms. He struggled, gasping, until he could fight clear and draw breath, dragging himself into a sitting position and shielding his head with crossed arms, then grasping an hysterical man's behind, and his middle, and his shoulders, to pull himself upright. He looked once at the terraced shrine, but the saffron-robed priests had fled, lacking the courage to fight on behalf of the god to whom their lives were supposedly dedicated.

Mandit Karr spat in disgust and fought his way toward the rear of the mob. His place was not here, fighting before the shrine. He loved the shrine, but if Ch'nanq had returned to the Field of Sorrow . . .

Wheezing and panting, Mandit Karr tore himself from the crowd's collective grasp.

"For Ch'nanq!" a voice screamed almost in his ear, and a big fist clobbered his face. Mandit Karr fell into the mud once more, and was kicked, and trod on. Then the berserk fellow found another foe and, dirty and battered, Mandit Karr stood on his one sound leg once more. I'm old, he thought. Old age - - a disease you did not recover from. Wearily, he dragged himself through the crowded streets toward the Field of Sorrow. He wondered if, before this night was over, blood would again be flowing like flood waters through the streets of Purname City.

CHAPTER V

THE FIELD of Sorrow was an enormous oval of greensward on the eastern edge of Purname City. It had been cleared and planted with the best grass seed of two worlds twenty years before, before the riots had started. It had not been called the Field of Sorrow then; it had been given that name later by the Purnamese after the people from the sky had been vanquished, as much because they would not fight back as because their weapons had failed them before the onslaught of ten million Purnamese who blamed them for the choking heat, and the floods, and the forced migration from Pur-

name (fourth of the name).

In the very middle of the Field of Sorrow now, squatting there like some immense bug, was the star-ship. This was according to plan, for the Operation Disaster expedition of twenty years ago had laid out the field as a flat expanse to receive the ship of the next - - and final - - expedition. On it, the members of the expedition, first rescuing the false deity Anson Channing, who had almost succeeded in the role of Ch'nanq, Purnamese god-sun, had perished.

It was night and although no rain fell, rain was in the thick, soupy air. The field was muddy, but if it did not rain soon all the moisture would be wrung from the Field of Sorrow and the choking dust would make it difficult to breathe. On the edge of the green-sward a crowd had gathered, and even from this distance you could hear their disturbed murmuring. Disturbed, not angry, for you couldn't tell yet what the noise meant

"Purname," Mark Channing said.

Susan Jamison told him, "Get your feet back on the ground, Channing. You're only a man." Mocking him because his father had played a deity. But didn't she feel any of the wonder of it? of another world, a sister Earth, two thousand light years across galac-

tic space? of a crumbling civilization which owed its very existence to a handful of Earthmen who had perished that it might live?

Group Leader Hoffstaeder, an anthropologist who had been a student at the Academy when the last Purnamese expedition ended in disaster, raised his hand and instantly his companions stood still. "There's no sense just marching out there," he said. "The crowd sounds mean."

"Maybe they're just frightened, sir," Mark suggested. "After all, wouldn't you be if a deity had just come down?"

"We're not armed," Hoffstaeder said pointlessly.

"Who said anything about a deity?" Susan Jamison demanded. "My father's logbook clearly said that the expedition did everything it could to dispell that notion, even though Anson Channing had fabricated it without authorization."

"But don't you see?" Mark cried. "That's what caused all the trouble! They believed in my father. Faced with catastrophe and fast losing hold of whatever civilization and culture they had left, they needed something to believe in. Then, when the expedition decided to deny the god in their midst, the Purnamese broke into factions, and - -"

"That's enough, Channing, Jam-

ison." Hoffstaeder said. "We haven't come here to go over all the old issues again. We've come here to do a job and the first step is to see what sort of reception our technicians can expect. Which is why we social scientists were first out."

Mark asked, "Then what are we waiting for?"

"Channing, don't you understand anything?" Hoffstaeder snapped. "I never said I wasn't on your side - - in theory. But we can't simply rush into this. We can't take the chance, because - -"

"Are our few lives more important than two hundred million Purnamese facing certain death when their sun goes supernova?"

"Will you listen to me? Are two hundred million Purnamese worth the future and possible intragalactic brotherhood of all mankind?"

"No," Mark admitted, wondering what the Group Leader had in mind.

"All right. Then we can't afford to lose our lives here. The expedition must be a success - - in every way. Do you think the Academy and everything it stands for, could function without yearly national donations on Earth?"

"No, but - -"

"And do you think those donations will be made if we perish like the last expedition perished - -

even if we succeed in getting the Purnamese into space?"

"I guess not, but - -"

Wong, the linguist, said suddenly, "They're coming, Chief."

"A delegation?" asked Hoffstaeder, peering into the darkness. Liu Wong had the sharpest eyes among them.

"It does not look like a delegation," Wong said promptly, anxiously.

SOON THE others saw the crowd approaching them across the expanse of greensward. Those in the forefront were running, but not rapidly. Their feet made a sodden sound in the mud and the clinging ooze slowed them down. When they came closer it could be seen that they brandished sticks and clubs, but some behind them and fighting to gain the forefront were weaponless and shouted, "Ch'nanq! Ch'nanq!"

"Tell them we come in peace," Hoffstaeder told Wong uneasily. He knew that Captain MacCready's crew, watching from the viewports of the Operation Disaster starship, would back them with blasters if necessary. But if it turned out to be necessary then the expedition would end in abortive failure almost before its work had got underway.

Wong bellowed something in the

Purnamese tongue. Mark, who had a fair grasp of Purnamese, heard him say: "It is necessary that we come to help you once more in your time of troubles, brothers of Purname."

But the Purnamese hooted him down and jabbered back at him and he turned to Hoffstaeder and said, "I'm afraid they won't listen, Chief."

Hoffstaeder shook his head wearily. "We couldn't tell in advance what their reaction would be. All right, then. We're going back to the ship."

"But we can't!" Mark cried. "We've got to - -"

"We aren't through yet, Channing," Hoffstaeder said, "not by a long shot. We'll wait until the interest in the ship dies down, and send a couple of researchers out in secret, and - -"

"Wait!" Mark exploded. "How can we wait? Every minute we wait makes it that much of a gamble with the lives of the Purnamese. Don't you understand, sir? This world is due to be vaporized. Vaporized, sir, in a split second. Besides, if we send researchers out in secret, and if they're found sneaking around, how would that look to the Purnamese? We've got to be forthright, and - -"

"Like your father?" Susan Jamison said coldly.

"Yes, like my father. His name happened to sound like the name of their god. It wasn't his idea at first, you'll find that out if you bother to read *your* father's log-book carefully. And Lord knows no love was lost between our fathers. But he was honest. He never claimed to be a deity."

"He never denied it."

"He thought it better not to deny it."

The Purnamese by this time had formed a half circle around the Earthmen, waiting for them to make the first overt move. There was much shaking of clubs and rattling together of sticks, though. The Purnamese, all males, were dressed only in loincloths in the sultry heat. To Mark they looked neither savage nor civilized but in some intermediary stage. Finally, one of them spoke. He talked rapidly and there was competition from the others and even some fighting in the rear ranks of the two hundred or so natives, so Mark couldn't make out his words. But Wong translated faultlessly:

"Go back where you come from, skymen. A generation ago you caused the blood to flow like flood waters in the streets of our city and already with news of your coming there are riots. Go back."

"Tell them," Hoffstaeder said, "we'll return to our ship but we're

not leaving Purname, not just yet."

Wong spoke and was immediately answered. "They said we must leave Purname immediately. They repeated we cause disturbances and riots."

Hoffstaeder shook his head and muttered in English, "And can save all their lives, if they'll let us. Tell them no, we cannot go away. Tell them we are here to help them again."

Wong spoke, and fierce voices drowned out his words. "They threaten, Chief," Wong said. "I think we'd better go back. I think . . ."

A stone was flung, striking Wong in the shoulder. He cried out in surprise and pain and would have stumbled and fallen, but Hoffstaeder caught and steadied him. "Retreat, men," he said. "Orderly. No rushing. And don't turn your backs."

They edged toward the starship. The Purnamese followed them, half a dozen darting forward, brandishing clubs and sticks and shouting. At first Mark remained in his tracks, not wishing to retreat with the others and admit even temporary failure so soon after they had left the ship. Hoffstaeder called him urgently while the vanguard of the mob drew up half a dozen strides from him, jabbering among themselves.

Then, suddenly, Susan came toward Mark, taunting, "Do you want to be left behind to play a god, as your father did?"

BEFORE MARK could answer, things happened very swiftly. Three of the Purnamese rushed between the rest of the expedition and Susan and Mark. The remaining three swooped down on Mark and the girl, yelling fiercely. One swung his stick and it whistled by over Mark's head. Mark displayed his hands, palm outward, to show he was unarmed, but the Purnamese swung again and the stick *thunked* against Mark's shoulder, spinning him around and dropping him. His arm ached clear down to the fingertips but he shook himself and climbed unsteadily to his feet.

Susan screamed. She struggled in the grasp of two of the natives, kicking and writhing, but they bore her off while the others stood their ground. Mark rushed at them and was driven to the ground again by a rain of blows. He collapsed in the hot smothering darkness, dimly aware of feet pounding and squashing in across the muddy ground.

"They took Jamison," he heard Hoffstaeder say. Then he felt himself borne back toward the starship and a voice cried: "We've got to go after her." He did not real-

ize it was his own voice and that no one paid any attention until after they were inside the ship and the airlock had closed behind them.

He never quite lost consciousness, but remembered vaguely being taken to the ship's infirmary, being examined by one of the medics, being given a hypodermic and some dressings for his bruises.

Then - - he never knew how much time had elapsed - - Dr. Culcross, the expedition's leader, was at his bedside. "I'm afraid you made a mess of things, son," he said.

Mark didn't answer.

"Hoffstaeder tells me that if you'd gone back with the others, the girl wouldn't have been taken. But that's neither here nor there. Can you think straight? Can you answer some questions?"

Mark nodded, thinking of Susan Jamison. It was his fault, all right, for she'd come to get him, even if she had done so with a taunt on her lips.

"The concensus of opinion is that some religious fanatics took Jamison - - possibly as a sacrifice to appease their god."

"But the Purnamese don't go in for human sacrifice!" Mark cried out.

"Didn't, you mean. Twenty years ago. Channing, don't you see, we're dealing with a people who have slid back a generation closer to

savagery? But you're our expert on their religion, so we wanted to ask you - - "

"How can I tell you anything, Dr. Culcross, if we're in basic disagreement? The whole concept of the Purnamese religion is opposed to the very idea of human sacrifice."

"Was opposed, you mean."

"All right. But if you've already convinced yourself, why ask me?"

"We're convinced of nothing. It was only a guess on the part of the other anthropologists, but don't you see, the girl's life may be in the balance? What we want to know is the sort of procedure the Purnamese could be expected to follow, where they might take their victim, how we might be able to find them"

"You're going after her?" Mark asked hopefully. So far, everything about the expedition had been frustrating, because no positive action had been taken.

"I didn't say that. We must remember Captain MacCready's advice, Channing. But if we know what to expect, and if somehow we could get a message through, agreeing to leave Purname if they return Miss Jamison"

"Leave? And let the Purnamese die in the supernova explosion?"

There was no answer to that. Dr. Culcross looked at Hoffstae-

der, who shrugged. Finally Mark nodded and told them he would sketch in the Purnamese sun-worshipping religion for them, and did so. His body ached from the blows he had received, but while he spoke he could feel his strength slowly returning. Just as he finished, a member of the crew rushed into the infirmary, saluted and shouted: "A mob of the natives! Coming this way! Throwing things!"

HIS WORDS were hardly necessary, for just then a clattering hail of stones resounded against the ship's hull. The crewman's eyes were big with fright and Mark could imagine what he was thinking - how he'd signed on with the expedition to get out of the penitentiary for a while, but how he hadn't expected anything like this.

Dr. Culcross rushed into the companionway and Mark followed him. They found Captain MacCready near the main airlock, talking with some of the non-coms, the few non-convicts in the crew, including Otto Spade.

" . . . mow them down with blaster fire," the Captain was saying. "But we're not going to. With Dr. Culcross' permission, we'll leave this world first."

"But not without Miss Jamison," Dr. Culcross said.

Captain MacCready gave him a

long, searching look. "I hope not," he said slowly. "I sincerely hope not, doctor. Naturally, though, we couldn't endanger the entire expedition for one person."

Almost, Mark found it hard to believe his ears. MacCready was no martinet. It might have been better if he were. No, he was firm but polite, co-operative, and could even be charming. But, Mark now realized, he was one of those military men incapable of filling a command position. He knew the letter of the military regulations, but would never understand the spirit if he lived to be a hundred.

"Mr. Spade tells us the crew is uneasy," he informed Dr. Culcross. "Isn't that right, Mr. Spade?"

"Yes, sir. The Cons are grumbling. But what the hell, cons always do."

"Anything serious?" Dr. Culcross asked.

Spade shrugged. "Never can tell, with cons. Give the non-coms half a chance to whip them back into a semblance of discipline, though, and you can forget your worrying."

"I don't follow you," Dr. Culcross said.

"Captain's orders, doc. Go easy on the crew."

Dr. Culcross' face whitened in anger as he looked at the military man. "Don't you realize if we lose

discipline we've lost everything?"

"Doctor," recited Captain MacCready, "I was told to forget my crew was made up of convicts. I was told to treat them as free men."

"Well," said Otto Spade, "free men in a spaceship crew have got to take orders, Cap'n."

"I'll thank you to keep out of this!" MacCready snapped.

Culcross raised his eyebrows at Spade, but the big-chested, short-legged man shrugged. Just then a crewman rushed up and said, "Sir, someone's at the rear airlock!"

"Purnamese?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Captain MacCready said, preparing to follow the man. Outside, stones continued to clatter against the ship's hull. Although they received no invitation, the other three followed Captain MacCready aft.

The Purnamese had been admitted to the airlock chamber, but the inner door was still secured. Half a dozen crew members were milling uneasily about it.

"Has any of you men a blaster?" the captain asked.

"We're not allowed to bear arms, sir," one of the crewmen reminded him as Otto Spade said: "I'm armed," and drew out his blaster.

"Open the inner door, then," Captain MacCready said.

Someone came forward and turned the lock-wheel and a moment later the tumblers clicked. Wong the linguist had been summoned and was just arriving when a tall, solemn-looking, tan-skinned Purnamese entered the ship. Twenty years ago, according to Hurley Jamison's logbook and the stories Otto Spade had told, the Purnamese were white-skinned, whiter than Caucasian Earthman. But now, if this man were any indication, a change in their sun's radiation had tanned them a rich bronze color.

THE PURNAMESE took two steps into the companionway, and fell forward. Mark lunged at him, catching him before he hit the floor. Blood welled suddenly from his mouth and nose, his shoulders and back were raw and welted. He had been clubbed almost to death.

"Get a doctor!" Otto Spade cried.

"Question him if you can," Captain MacCready told Wong.

For once Mark found himself in agreement with the Captain. If the Purnamese had come here to tell them something they had to hear it no matter what. Mark eased the native to the floor, took off his tunic and folded it for a pillow, then offered him water which someone

had brought in a little flask. The man drank greedily, but could not hold the water down. It came up again mixed with blood.

"Lung damage," Captain MacCready guessed. "Maybe a rib's punctured it. Well, go ahead, Wong."

Wong spoke Purnamese slowly, earnestly. The native shook his head and Wong said, "He has nothing to do with the mob outside. When the mob saw he was trying to come in here, they beat him and stoned him."

"Then ask him what he does want," Captain MacCready said.

Wong spoke again. The native answered slowly, haltingly, the flow of blood from his mouth hardly more than a trickle except when he coughed. And Wong said:

"There seem to be two factions, sir. The group outside wants us to leave at once. The group this man represents is holding Susan Jamison as a hostage so that, should we stay, they can be assured we plan no harm for them."

Captain MacCready said, "Would a migration into space if we tell them their planet is doomed be considered a harmful act?"

Wong repeated the question and the Purnamese nodded at once, earnestly, then spoke. Wong translated, "He says their god does not tell them to move. He says they

have no further place to go."

"Tell them we'll find a new world for them," Dr. Culcross said. "A better world. A permanent home for all their people. Tell this man that their world is doomed. Tell him we don't have much time in which to act. Tell him if we don't begin the evacuation soon, many will perish needlessly."

Wong spoke. Whenever he paused for breath, the native shook his head. Mark could understand most of the words although he didn't have Wong's facility for speaking them. Clearly, the injured native wasn't buying anything.

"If you do any of these things, captain," Wong said, "he assures us the girl will never be returned."

Captain MacCready shook his head bitterly. "They couldn't even return Miss Jamison if they wanted to, not with that mob out there. Ask him about that."

Wong put the question in Purnamese, but abruptly the native hemorrhaged, the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils. The medic arrived moments later, but by then the Purnamese had lost consciousness. The medic was unable to stop the bleeding and the Purnamese died on the way to the infirmary.

Captain MacCready asked Wong, "Did he say anything about where they were keeping her?"

"No, sir. He did not."

"Wasn't there any indication?"

"Sir," Mark interrupted, "I consider myself responsible. I'd like permission to go after the girl."

"You? What could you do? You couldn't even get past that mob outside."

"If the native got in, I could get out."

"He got in - - and died."

"I could try one of the other locks. Or I could get out through one of the exhaust vanes, they wouldn't be expecting that. I know I could make it, sir."

"Then what would you do?"

"Why, go to Purname City and find Miss Jamison and bring her back."

"Just like that, Channing? You're an anthropologist, not an expert on one-man guerilla warfare."

"But that's just it, sir! I'm an expert on Purname. I know this planet. I know Purname City. If anyone has a chance to get through and find Miss Jamison, I'm the man."

"What the lad says makes sense, sir," Otto Spade said.

But Captain MacCready shook his head.

"I'll go with him, sir," Otto Spade said unexpectedly.

Mark looked at the older man with surprise.

But Captain MacCready shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not. You wouldn't have a chance. Besides, Spade, I need you here. I appreciate the way you both volunteered to risk your necks, but the answer is no."

LATER, still feeling weak from his beating, Mark retired to his cabin. He felt utterly helpless and wondered what they were doing with Susan Jamison right now, this minute. The fact that she hated him because her father had hated his father hardly mattered. She was in trouble and it was his fault.

The ship was very quiet now. Even the natives outside had put at least a temporary stop to the rain of stones. It would be sunrise soon on Purname, Mark thought. He wasn't sleepy although he knew he needed rest. Sunrise. At sunrise his last chance to sneak away from the ship without being spotted by the natives outside would be gone. But Captain MacCready had turned him down.

Mark shook his head bleakly, wondering if it had gone this way twenty years ago. Had his father, also volunteering, been turned down? Perhaps, but his father hadn't stewed over it. His father had taken the bull by the horns and . . .

... And his memory was hated to this day. But still, what did that matter? Hated or not, his father had been responsible for the success of the last Operation Disaster mission to Purname, hadn't he? And I'm his son, Mark thought. No love is lost on me because they don't think I merit being an Agent. Well, if I have the name, I might as well have the game

Mark got up quickly and slipped out into the companionway. He took three strides in the dim blue nightlit companionway - - and collided with someone.

"Mark?" a rasping voice said softly.

"Otto! I thought - -"

"I guess we both had the same idea, boy. I was coming to get you. If that captain thinks we're going to let them keep the girl without making a move - - but mind you! No tricks like your old man pulled, or I'll take you over my knee and tan your hide. And don't think I couldn't do it, either. Well?"

Mark stuck out his hand, wordless, and Spade shook it.

"Exhaust vane?" Mark asked quietly.

"I think so. They wouldn't expect that outside. We'll come out covered with grease, but we'll come out without being spotted. Let's go."

Fifteen minutes later, they had carefully jimmied loose the vane's inner cover. Inside it smelled of grease and spent air and ozone. Mark went first, crawling awkwardly, slipping on the greased surface, then stretching out full length and crawling when he approached the narrow rear of the tube, barely wide enough to admit him.

When he reached the end, Mark struck his head against something solid. He could hear Spade's grunts as the older man worked his way through the tube behind him. Mark said, "Lid's on, Otto."

"Probably covered it to keep out the dampness. Wouldn't want one of these babies to go rusty on you. Try and force it, boy."

Mark stretched his hands out and pushed. He could not get the strength of his shoulders behind them, though, and the lid did not yield an inch.

"Don't push on her steadily," Spade said. "She has to be jerked loose. Give her some blows with your fists, boy."

Mark struck the lid repeatedly with both fists, pushing his arms straight forward and not getting his weight behind them. The lid remained secure.

"I can't hudge it."

"Keep trying."

Mark pounded at the lid again, wondering suddenly if the Purnam-

ese natives outside would hear the sound and be able to locate it. Then, all at once, although his last blows seemed no harder than any of the others, the lid came loose. The air was clean and fresh - - but, incredibly, even hotter than the close air inside the exhaust vane. Mark squirmed out of the vane and shinned himself down to the ground. The effort it took was only slight, but covered him with sweat.

A moment later, Spade came down heavily alongside him. Spade was panting. "Hardly could breathe in there," he grunted, "and it isn't much better out here. Set, boy?"

"Set," Mark said.

"Then let's go."

Other shadows prowled the darkness. Mark could see them, and knew they were Purnamese natives standing guard on the starship, perhaps intending to resume their fusilade in the morning. Crouching, trying to keep himself out of silhouette against the vaguely brighter sky, Mark headed across the wide, treeless field. He was aware of Spade dogging his footsteps and soon broke into a jog.

Then Spade tripped.

He sprawled heavily, crying out instinctively. A voice called in Purnamese, "Stop!" Spade picked himself up and hissed, "Run for it!

We've got to run for it."

Mark sprinted across the field. Shadows flitted before him, came closer, danced around him. He struck at the darkness with his fist and heard a scream. Something struck the ground, making a squashy sound. Muddy water splashed up at him and for a moment the ring of shadows was broken.

"Otto?" he called.

"Behind you!"

Mark ran.

CHAPTER VI

MANDIT KARR still could not believe that the saffron-robed priests of Ch'nanq, had kidnapped the Earth girl and were holding her as a hostage. But it was so. It was so - - and much else had transpired this night in Purname City.

Riots were wide-spread now. There were three factions: those who wanted to destroy the skyship; those who wanted the skyship to leave them in peace; and those, Mandit Karr among them, who believed Ch'nanq was returning to his people in their grave time of troubles. The priests of Ch'nanq belonged to the second group. They meant the girl no harm, they said, and Mandit Karr believed them. But with the girl in their hands, they said, the men

from Earth would do nothing to which they were opposed.

Meanwhile, looters and rioters prowled the streets of Purname City. The priests had called upon Mandit Karr, a famous old military hero, for help. And, pegleg or no, Mandit Karr now found himself back in uniform.

He was in conference with Bah-ch'nanq, the high priest of Ch'nanq, a withered old man with a black maw of a mouth and the longest fingernails Mandit Karr had ever seen and a smell like an old goat. Bah-ch'nanq said in his reedy voice,

"First, the riots must be stopped. We control nothing if we do not control our own people."

"But," Mandit Karr protested, "what about the Earth ship? What about - -"

"Ah, then you do call it an Earth ship? Merely a ship from another world, a sister world to Purname? I thought you believed that sacrilege of the deity returning . . ."

"And still you put me back in uniform?"

"We need you, Mandit Karr. The people know your name. They trust you. What you believe does not matter - - for the moment."

"I have not changed my beliefs."

"You truly think Ch'nanq is in

that ship, returning to us?"

"Yes," said Mandit Karr devoutly.

The high priest Bah-ch'nanq grinned his toothless, black-mawed grin. "A god - - in a spaceship?"

Mandit Karr shrugged. "I do not know how gods travel between the worlds, Bah-ch'nanq. I only know that last time Ch'nanq came to - -"

"If it was Ch'nanq."

Mandit Karr laughed softly. "I believe you are afraid to face the personification of the god whose godhood it is your business to worship."

"Look you, Mandit Karr," Bah-ch'nanq said. "If that had indeed been the lord Ch'nanq a generation ago, think you he could not have saved our world?"

"He chose another way."

"Evacuating us from a world which could no longer support us! For it had grown too hot - - with the heat of Ch'nanq the sun, Mandit Karr. Mark you this. His own heat. Yet, instead of stopping it, he came to us and - -"

"I don't know the ways of the god."

"But you believe?"

"I believe, Bah-ch'nanq. Do you?"

The high priest's face, in color a paler version of the saffron yellow of his robe, drained pale. "Enough,"

he said. "You have your job, Mandit Karr. Your command awaits you. Stop the riots."

"Killing people who are as confused as I am - - or as you are - - is that what you want? Is that what Ch'nanq would want?"

"You have your orders. Control must be re-established or the city will fall to chaos."

Probably, Mandit Karr had to admit, the old priest was right at least about this. He asked, "The girl is safe?"

"Safe, yes. She's no concern of yours."

"Have you asked her if she's a handmaiden of the god?"

"Mandit Karr. Leave religious matters to me."

"But don't you see? The god's wrath - -"

"I'll worry about the god's wrath. You worry about the rioters. They are thickest on the edge of the city, near the Field of Sorrow. My agents tell me that in the morning they will march, but it is not known where they will march. Either out to the Field of Sorrow and the Earth spaceship - - or back here to the heart of the city and the shrine of Ch'nanq." Bah-ch'nanq's small eyes grew crafty. "I tell you this, Mandit Karr. If they march on the spaceship, let them. Either the Earthmen will defend themselves, slaying many of

the rioters and restoring order for us, or the mob will destroy the spaceship and expend its fury there on the Field of Sorrow. Mark you these words, then: if the mob marches onto the Field, let them go. Bar their return with your troops, if necessary."

Mandit Karr was stunned to silence. The high priest went on, "If, on the other hand, they march back toward the center of the city, and this shrine, then they must be stopped at all costs. Is that clear?"

It was clear, all right. Mandit Karr let the nails of his fingers dig into his palms painfully. He had an impulse to throttle the high priest, whose first concern was for his own life. The veins on his neck stood out and with an effort he said,

"If the Bah-ch'nanq is finished?"

"Yes, Mandit Karr. Execute the orders I have given you."

Mandit Karr bowed out of the audience chamber. He went outside to where his hundred hand-picked troops were waiting. One hundred men - - it hardly seemed like much in the teeth of a city-wide riot. But, cursing softly and steadily, Mandit Karr issued his orders.

HE LED his troops from the courtyard of the shrine toward the Field of Sorrow. Dawn

was already chasing the stars from the eastern sky, but torches and bonfires glowed red in Purname City. The soldiers were pelted with offal and stones and house-slops, but Mandit Karr refused them permission to retaliate. There was much derisive shouting, much threatening on all sides, but the band of a hundred men marched steadily in a compact formation across the city.

Here 'and there a fire-gutted ruin, still smouldering, bore testimony to the mob's violence. Bands of urchins roved too, looting. It seemed to Mandit Karr that all his people had needed was a spark to ignite them - - and the spark had been supplied by the coming of the Earth ship.

Ch'nanq! he thought. We of Purname need you, if ever a people needed their god. Ch'nanq! Manifest yourself to us, Ch'nanq!

The mobs were larger and better organized on the edge of the Field of Sorrow. This would be so, Mandit Karr thought: they represented the faction which wanted to destroy the Earth ship. Mandit Karr called his troops to a halt, realizing that the strung-out marching formation would be dangerous here, for his men might be snipped off in groups as a shears snips cloth. Mandit Karr wheeled his hundred troops into a block-like battle formation

ten across and ten deep, with a slight avenue bisecting the block from front to rear. The first line of ten was composed of lancers, their long pikes bristling, gleaming in the torchlight, forming a barrier protruding ten feet ahead of the massive formation. Behind the lancers stood two rows of bowmen and behind them, with swords and clubs, seven rows of foot soldiers, ready to break formation and charge up the avenue provided for them at Mandit Karr's command.

"Men!" Mandit Karr shouted, trying to mask his reluctance with the volume of his voice. "Here we stand! If the mobs come back from the skyship, we stop them. If they come from the rear, approaching the skyship, we open the foot-soldiers' avenue and let them pass and close behind them, barring return."

These were Bah-ch'nanq's orders, and Mandit Karr gave them now to the soldiers of his command. But he prayed that something would happen which would make him disregard those orders. His soldiers were hand-picked, he knew: probably the best troops on all Purname. At first he had thought they could do little in the face of city-wide rioting, but now he wasn't so sure. Their formation was tight; their morale, excellent; their battle-readiness, superb. And,

if Mandit Karr were given half an opportunity, they would be fighting on the side of Ch'nanq, though where the god's side lay was not as yet clear to the one-legged veteran.

A scout returned across the Field of Sorrow on the dead run, raised his arm in salute and cried, "They're coming this way!"

"Who, man?" demanded Mandit Karr.

"Rioters, sir. Chasing two from the skyship."

Mandit Karr bawled: "Formation - - *read-iii!*"

Lances came up, were thrust back against rests, pointed forward in a solid line at an angle of thirty degrees. Bowmen notched arrows, waiting the order to draw them back. Foot soldiers drew their swords.

The pound-suck, pound-suck, pound-suck of feet running across the mud was heard and the angry challenge and counter-challenge of voices further out across the Field of Sorrow. In the first light of dawn Mandit Karr saw two figures rushing toward him, and a mob brandishing clubs and staves a half hundred paces back. The two fugitives were wearing the leatheroid jumpers of the Earthship people, and Mandit Karr's heart leaped into his throat as the sight of them dissolved twenty

years of time.

"Open the footsoldiers' avenue!" roared Mandit Karr as the two Earthmen came staggering toward them through the mud. The Earthmen, seeing the battle formation materialize suddenly from the mists on the edge of the Field of Sorrow, tried to check their headlong flight and swerve off to one side. But momentum and the clinging mud made this difficult and another moment found them within Mandit Karr's formation.

"Lancers, *for-ward!*" yelled Mandit Karr, and his column of lancers advanced slowly on the van of the mob. Staves and lances rang together in the dissipating pre-dawn mists, shouts rolled out across the Field of Sorrow, and the mob - - its energies spent in the long chase - - was quickly scattered.

The lancers returned, sweating and elated. Mandit Karr spun about and stalked into the foot soldiers' avenue to see what game he had snared. The first Earthman, panting, grease-and-mud covered, glaring defiantly, was short, stocky, and seemed very strong. The second Earthman . . .

All at once Mandit Karr fell on his knees, touching his forehead to the soft, yielding ground, then lifting his eyes boldly for a second look which was immediately followed by a second prostration.

"The lord god-sun Ch'nanq has returned!" he cried in a voice which carried to all his troops.

Those nearest the Earthmen looked, and the older ones among them remembered the god Ch'nanq of twenty years before, if, indeed, it had been their deity.

The face they saw before them was the same.

Some of them had seen Ch'nanq apparently die, as Mandit Karr had. Did they need any further proof? Here he was again, reborn after a generation, returned to Purname to help them a second time. A man, a mere mortal, hacked to pieces before your very eyes by the blows of a dozen swords, could not return to life twenty years later. But a god could. A god could do anything.

"The lord god-sun Ch'nanq has returned!" Mandit Karr cried devoutly a second time.

Slowly, by two's and three's, the soldiers knelt before Mark Channing.

CHAPTER VII

HERBERT FULLER, the chief astrogator of the Operation Disaster starship, destroyed the carefully plotted return-orbit a moment before the mutineers broke into the ship's astrodome.

The act was purely instinctive

on Herbert Fuller's part. He did not have time to sit down and think it out carefully, step by step. Step one: fearing for their lives because the angry mobs outside the starship renewed their stoning in the morning and even brought a felled tree as a battering ram to use against the main airlock, the convict-crew broke into the arsenal, armed itself, and rushed swiftly to overpower the unarmed and outnumbered expedition members. Step two: the many little battles, most of which Herbert Fuller had not seen, all of which had been won by the mutineering crew resulting in six fatalities including the chief anthropologist, Hoffstaeder, ended in complete victory for the crew. Step three: a delegation came swiftly to the astrodome to secure the ship's return-flight orbit, realizing they could never leave Purname's solar system without it since sub-space orbits had to be calculated with almost awesome accuracy. Step four: Herbert Fuller had entered the astrodome seconds before they arrived, had rushed to his computing table and set a match to his calculations. Then the half dozen crewmen broke in.

"Give it to us," one of them said. There was a smear of blood on his forehead and probably, Herbert Fuller thought, it was not his

own blood. Herbert Fuller was dazed by it all, still not precisely aware of what had happened. He had no way of knowing that half - - if not more - - of history's heroes are forged in just such confusion.

"No," he said, dropping the ash of the return-orbit to the floor.

"You burned it?" one of the crewmen asked.

Herbert Fuller nodded, stirring the ashes with the toe of his shoe.

"Compute it again," the leader of the crewmen ordered.

"No, I won't," Herbert Fuller heard himself saying.

"You better, son."

"I've had no orders from the captain."

"The captain's a prisoner."

"Then I'll have to make my own judgment," said Herbert Fuller.

"The Jamison girl is still out there somewhere. And two members of the expedition were found to be missing this morning, making three in all out there. So - -"

"He talks too much. Hit him."

The fist struck Herbert Fuller's jaw. He was a civilized man from a civilized world in a civilized job. He had never been struck before, not since he was a child. He had expected pain, but felt very little. What he felt was mostly a numbness flooding out from his jaw, engulfing him. Then he fell over backwards and his legs went up

into the air foolishly and after that he lay on the floor.

"Compute another orbit," one of the crewmen said.

Herbert Fuller shook his head. Something tickled his chin and he rubbed at it with his hand and then looked at his hand, which now was glistening with blood, his blood, leaking from his mouth across his chin. It startled him.

Someone kicked Herbert Fuller's ribs, and that hurt more than the blow on the jaw. He groaned.

"If you have some crazy idea we're going to sit around," one of the crewmen said, "and let the natives break in here and kill us or maybe eat us - -"

"They couldn't break in," said Herbert Fuller coldly, fighting down the nausea which had engulfed him as the numbness had engulfed him before. "Besides, the Purnames don't eat people."

"Just compute the orbit."

"I will not do it," Herbert Fuller said.

THEY DRAGGED him to his feet. They hit him. They held him there when he would have fallen and hit him again. He was rocking back and forth. That was when they hit him and let him go and caught him. The pain wasn't very much. Then they hit him in the stomach and he collapsed

slowly, wishing he could vomit but wishing he could begin breathing again first. After a while they threw water on him and dragged him to his feet again, and the talk went like this:

"Compute the orbit!"

"I will not compute it."

"We're going to hurt you some more."

"I will not compute it."

"Don't be a fool. What does it get you?"

"I will not compute it."

"Hit him, Stan."

"I will not"

He was hardly aware of saying the words. Nor was he particularly aware of being struck again, of being supported from behind, of being doused with water a second time, and interrogated, and hit again, and doused, and bloodied . . .

Then he was unconscious.

"We'll kill him."

"You better not kill him. You want to be stuck here forever?"

"He must be made out of iron. Look at him. Just a little guy. Without muscles."

"See if you can make him come to."

"No. He's really out. When he fell he hit his head pretty hard."

"Lift his eyelid and see if he's faking."

"Hey, will you look at that! The whites rolled back on him."

"Feel his heart, you fool!"

"O. K., but"

"It's beating?"

"No. No, he's dead."

They crowded around Herbert Fuller's body, two or three of them taking turns examining him. None of them could discern a heart-beat. They did not look at the back of the dead man's head, which had struck a sharp flange of metal on the way down and which had been crushed.

Half an hour later, a delegation informed the imprisoned Captain MacCready that the starship's astrologator was among the casualties. "You fools," said Captain MacCready. "To return to Earth you stage a mutiny, and seven men die. How can you return to Earth now?"

The crewmen looked at one another, and most of them were smiling. They had not received life sentences in the penitentiary for petty larceny. "You're forgetting, captain," one of them said. They had no discipline, no acknowledged leader. They spoke when they had a mind to speak.

"You sure are forgetting," another one of them said.

"Well, what is it?"

"We're all lifers. There's no death penalty anyplace but on Earth. We go back to Earth - - and we're right back where we started

from. They can't do a thing to us they didn't plan to do already. Or - - " a sudden light came into the old man's eyes - - "how does this sound, men? We don't go back to Earth at all. We find ourselves a world somewhere, what we can live on. It's bound to be better than prison."

There was general assent, but Captain MacCready was laughing softly, steadily.

"What's so funny?"

"What you told me before. The astrogator was dead. You can't leave a planetary system for sub-space without a carefully computed orbit, you know that."

"Sure, but don't try and tell us there ain't another astrogator on the ship's list! Leave Earth with one astrogator - - like hell!"

"Oh, we have a pinch-hitting astrogator aboard," Captain MacCready said. "That is, we *had* one."

"What the hell do you mean by that, Cap'n?"

"Otto Spade," Captain MacCready said.

"Tben get him."

Captain MacCready said, "Otto left the ship with Mark Channing some time during the night. There isn't a living man aboard now who can plot a decent sub-space orbit."

The mutineers looked at one another in baffled silence. Nobody tried to stop him when Cap-

tain MacCready began his soft chuckling again.

CHAPTER VIII

"GET ON your feet," Mark said awkwardly in Purnamese. "I'm not the lord god-sun. Channing is my name, and - - "

"Ch'nanq!" cried the leader of the soldiers, the gnarled but powerful-looking one-legged man. "Ch'nanq is your name, sire. But did you have to tell us? Do you think we have forgotten. Think you we cannot see your identity written all over your face? Think you Mandit Karr forgets his lord?"

"Careful," Otto Spade grumbled. "It's happening just like it happened with your old man." Spade had spoken in English.

Turning to him, the one-legged soldier who called himself Mandit Karr said, "What does the lord's subaltern wish?"

"Lord's subaltern!" scoffed Otto Spade.

"But is it strange? I remember the lord's subaltern from his last visitation, a generation ago. It is all the proof we need of the god sun's divinity."

"I don't get that," Spade told Mark, who shrugged.

"You see, lord," Mandit Karr went on, addressing Mark, "if for

reasons of your own you chose to hide your identity, the fact that the subaltern of the lord has aged in these twenty years but that you remain precisely as we remembered you, is proof enough of your godhood. What do you wish of us, lord?"

Mark checked himself. The expedition - - could the expedition do any better than he? But the expedition had all but admitted failure: Captain MacCready was for orbiting back to Earth and Dr. Culcross had been opposed primarily because Susan Jamison was a captive of the Purnamese. And, as a mortal member of the expedition, Mark knew he would fare no better. But as the deity of the Purnamese

He smiled with grim amusement. He could almost imagine his father, twenty years before, faced with virtually the identical problem. Actually, Mark thought, he would find the path to godhood simpler than his father had, for Anson Channing had already paved the way and the remarkable resemblance between father and son did all Mark's speaking for him.

But if he dared the impersonation, the expedition would not back him.

On the other hand, if he didn't go through with it, the expedition

would return to Earth in a short time and the doom of millions of Purnamese would be sealed. And besides, Susan Jamison was here in Purname City somewhere, and a god could find her a lot more swiftly than a mere mortal

Mandit Karr was saying, "Has the Lord Jimson returned to Purname as well?"

"The Lord Jimson?" Mark asked.

"Surely I need not remind the Lord Ch'nanq of the Lord Hul-Jimson, who led the revolt of the gods which divided my people as it divided the gods and led to the physical death of the Lord Ch'nanq's previous visitation, as well as of the Lord Jimson and all their servants, except for the subaltern of the god, this man here."

The Lord Hul-Jimson thought Mark wildly. Wasn't that obviously Hurley Jamison, whose logbook, brought back as the only written record of the ill-fated previous mercy expedition, had been instrumental in condemning Anson Channing's memory? Had Jamison, then, allotted to himself the role of a usurping deity? And had the Purnamese preferred their own Channing (Ch'nanq), angering the Lord Hul-Jimson? Could it be possible that Jamison, embittered for a reason they would never know,

had turned both the expedition and some of the natives against the elder Channing? After all, Hurley Jamison had been the expedition's anthropological chief, and perhaps he'd been the sort of man who would resent the way Anson Channing had stolen his thunder. Naturally, such resentment wouldn't actively take the form it ultimately had taken, but that hadn't been something Jamison could control.

"No," Mark said slowly, deliberately, "the lord Hul-Jimson did not return. The Lord Hul-Jimson can never return, for the Lord Hul-Jimson was a false god."

"Mark!" warned Otto Spade.

"Sire," breathed Mandit Karr, kneeling once more. "I had always hoped it would be so. Then in the home of the gods, you won?"

Mark nodded solemnly, and said, "Is there news of a hand-maiden who - -"

"The priests of Ch'nanq have her!" Mandit Karr groaned. "It hurts my heart to tell you, sire. Your own priests. The priests of Ch'nanq."

"In Purname City?"

"Yes, sire."

"Then take me there," Mark ordered.

"A moment, sire. How shall I say it? . . . The priests of Ch'nanq would rather worship idols than the return of their godhead.

Sire, don't you see - - they can control the idols."

"Then take me there," Mark said again.

Otto Spade grabbed his arm and said savagely in English, "Don't be a fool, lad. They're bound to be divided in the city. They'll tear you apart."

But Mark shook his head stubbornly. "They have Susan Jamison, Otto. It was my fault." He turned to Mandit Karr and cried over the din: "To Purname City!"

A moment later the military formation swept about and stormed across the edge of the Field of Sorrow toward the heart of Purname City and the rioting.

CHAPTER VIII

HE WAS a horrible looking old man and he smelled. It was an unclean smell, Susan Jamison thought, as the man himself was unclean. A dirty old man in a saffron yellow robe, chanting incantations in a small chamber hewn from stone at the top of the tower of Ch'nanq. He crouched before a fire and made passes over the flames with husk-like hands. It was almost as if he'd forgotten Susan Jamison was here, but she knew - - the knowledge making her afraid - - this wasn't so.

A stone door rolled ponderously

open. Three saffron robed lesser priests entered the chamber and one of them spoke to the old man so rapidly in Purnamese that Susan could not understand what was said. Outside, the noise of the mobs roving the streets sounded far away, like the distant ebbing and flowing of surf.

The old man scowled and shouted something. The lesser priests cowered before him. Spittle dribbled across his chin. *He's mad*, Susan thought desperately.

Bah-Ch'nanq said slowly: "The false god returns. You knew that, didn't you?"

Susan shook her head slowly. She did not understand.

The old priest clutched at her arm. He was surprisingly, incredibly strong. He forced her back close to the fire until she could feel its hot breath on her legs. "You knew he would come!" the priest repeated.

"I - - didn't - - know - - anything!" Susan sobbed.

One of the lesser priests jabbered again and Bah-ch'nanq listened, his eyes narrowing to slits. "We still have the girl," Bah-ch'nanq said when the lesser priest had finished. He had not let go of Susan's arm. When she tried to break from his grasp he struck her with his free hand and she whimpered and almost fell

into the fire.

"What are you going to do with me?" she said.

"Is there a god on your skyship?" Bah-ch'nanq asked.

"N-no."

"One who claims to be a god has returned here to Purname City a second time. Our people protested the coming of the skyship and rioted. But they won't fight their god."

"Ch - - Ch'nanq?" Susan asked incredulously, thinking that Mark Channing wouldn't dare.

"Yes. The false Ch'nanq. Doubtless he will insist that we leave our planet again, as he did a generation ago. Well," Bah-ch'nanq said, "perhaps all is not lost. Perhaps the other god has returned as well. Perhaps this time the other god will win."

"The - - other god?"

"Hul-Jimson," said Bah-ch'nanq reverently. "Last time, when the false Ch'nanq came to Purname, the unknown god Hul-Jimson came also. They fought and their fighting spread to my people. In the end, the false Ch'nanq had his way and we embarked for this world in the great fleet. But the men from the sky perished - - to a man."

"Except one," Susan said dully.

"One?"

"One got away."

"True. True, the subaltern of the false god. With him he took the words of the god Hul-Jimson. He"

THE PRIEST droned on, but Susan no longer heard him. She felt completely empty inside, shattered. Hul-Jimson. That, of course, would be Hurley Jamison. Her father. All her life she had idolized the memory of her father, always contrasting it with what she knew of Anson Channing. Somehow the image of her father had been good and pure and that of Channing, wicked. Channing, who had played god to a primitive people. And now Susan knew the truth: her father had done the same. In a sense, he had done worse than Anson Channing: for Channing had been mistaken for a deity by the Purnamese and had not bothered to deny it. But Hurley Jamison, if she could believe the dirty old man, the priest of Ch'nanq, had invented his own supernatural status.

A choice, Susan thought, the tears filling her eyes. Either my father was as wrong as Anson Channing and I have been guilty of the grossest injustice toward a dead man and his living son, or both Channing and my father did the only thing they could a generation ago - - and in that case my

injustice is even worse.

There was a third possibility but she refused to consider it. Anson Channing had played god because he had to. Hurley Jamison had played god because he had wanted to. Therefore, while Channing's godhood evacuated Purname (fourth of the name) and saved the Purnamese from fiery destruction, her father's godhood had caused dissention among the Purnamese - - and the death of the Earth expedition.

"What are you going to do?" Susan asked the priest suddenly. She did not want to think about it now. She had to think of other things.

"They are storming the city," Bah-ch'nanq said, "almost bloodlessly. On every street they gain a thousand converts. Such is the foolish faith of my people."

"Then there's nothing you can do about it?" Susan Jamison asked. She was almost happy, and it surprised her. She realized now that Anson Channing's way, a generation ago, had been the only way. She thanked God that his son was here and able to follow in his footsteps.

Bah-ch'nanq opened his black maw of a mouth. Susan realized he was smiling. "I wouldn't say that," he said. "I wouldn't say there is nothing we can do about

it. We have you."

The lesser priests grinned. Susan looked at Bah-ch'nanq's face, at the wild eyes, the drooling lips. This was a nightmare. It had to be a nightmare.

"If necessary," said Bah-ch'nanq slowly, "we can dismember you limb from limb. First the small finger from each hand. Then the next finger. Then . . . but I'm sure you see. If the false Ch'nanq was kept informed of our progress, was perhaps shown the fruits of it, don't you believe he might be induced to leave us in peace?"

"You're mad!" Susan cried, rushing for the door after wrenching free of the old man's grasp. "You're a madman!"

One of the lesser priests barred her path, but she pushed at him and he became tangled in the swirling folds of his robe. Susan lunged for the door.

Which closed ponderously in her face with a jarring thud of stone on stone.

"Bring her here," said Bah-ch'nanq slowly.

Susan screamed as the lesser priests came for her. But she knew no one outside the little room would hear her.

"CH'NANQ!" THEY roared on the street corners of

Purname City as the full light of dawn and the day's first fierce heat engulfed the city.

"Ch'nanq!"

"Ch'nanq!"

The one word, torn from a thousand throats, became a surging sea of sound. The soldiers of Mandit Karr were surrounded and borne through the streets by the mob like conquering heroes. Spontaneous demonstrations of faith replaced the night's ugly rioting magically wherever they went. *This isn't for me*, Mark thought with deep emotion. It was for his father. It was wonderful, and the hour of it which Mark experienced made up for twenty years of pain.

They rolled with the crowd to the very center of Purname City, where the great Tower of the God pierced the heat haze flickering in the sky. Mark felt himself borne aloft on shoulders, carried about, lifted, dropped, lifted again, on a wild sea of humanity. He smiled. A god -- or a conquering hero. The Purnamese hardly seemed to make the distinction.

There was talk nearby but he could not hear it in the noise the crowd made. Finally, long after he had reached the center of the city and when the sun had already risen high, radiating a searing, strength-sapping heat, several people dragged him to one side,

Otto Spade and Mandit Karr among them.

"My people will do whatever you wish," Mandit Karr said. But strangely, his voice was sad.

"Then what's the matter?" Mark asked.

"The girl - - the handmaiden of whom you spoke. Bah-ch'nanq and the lesser priests have her. I remember the humanity of the Lord Ch'nanq last time - - and I am afraid."

"What are you afraid of?" Mark said. "Tell them to release her! Tell them - - tell them their god demands this."

"They worship only idols, sire. They will not listen."

"What are they going to do?"

"They threaten torture and death, sire - - if you don't go away. I am a soldier but I am afraid. I know you won't let them have their way with the girl but"

"Listen," Mark said. "Can we get up there?"

"Even if you tell them to," Mandit Karr groaned, "my soldiers wouldn't violate the shrine of the god."

"But think, man!" Otto Spade bellowed. "Here is the god, telling them" It was an about-face for the burly crewman, but Mark knew it wouldn't do any good.

"And start what started a gene-

ration ago all over again?" Mandit Karr asked. "Civil war, strife . . ."

"All right," Mark said. "Your men won't go up there, Mandit Karr. Will you?"

"I go wherever the lord Ch'nanq leads."

"You're a dead man if you set foot on that ramp!" Otto Spade bellowed. "According to Mandit Karr the priests are in a small room at the top of the tower. They can look down and see every inch of that ramp. You wouldn't have a chance."

"There is truth in what the subaltern of the god says," Mandit Karr admitted. "However," he added, "there is another way up which I found quite by accident while exploring the tower some years ago as a possible bastion of defense."

"Another way!" Mark said, his eyes brightening. "Do the priests know of it?"

"No, lord. I never told anyone."

"And you'll take me?"

"Yes, lord."

Even as they spoke, Mandit Karr was leading them through the crowd. He told them about Bah-ch'nanq, a mad old priest dedicated not to the god but to self-glory. "The old man is insane, I think," Mandit Karr said. "And he's desperate, lord. He'll do whatever he has to."

"We've got to hurry," Mark said, as if the urgency of his words could lend wings to their feet. The crowd pushed and buffeted on all sides, but Mandit Karr had supplied Mark wisely with a cowl which covered and hid his head and face. Finally they reached a point opposite the Tower of the God, two hundred yards across the square at the center of Purname City.

"I don't understand," Mark said. "How - -"

"Underground, lord," said Mandit Karr. "Come."

They entered a building of sandstone, walked down a corridor, descended a flight of stairs. A sword-girted, saffron-robed priest stood at the bottom. As they approached he unsheathed the sword and stood facing them boldly. "This way is barred to all but the priesthood," he intoned.

"How did you find - -" Mandit Karr blurted.

"Think you," laughed the young priest, "that you soldiers are the only ones with a desire to explore?"

For answer, Mandit Karr hurled himself at the priest. The sword lifted, flashed in the light of the single flambeaux that revealed a stone door behind the priest. Mandit Karr sagged heavily without a sound, the point of the blade

protruding from the middle of his back.

Froth bubbled at his lips as he swung around impaled. "Go, lord!" he cried - - and was dead.

While Otto Spade attacked the massive stone door, Mark rushed at the slayer-priest and struck him savagely in the face before the sword could be withdrawn from Mandit Karr's corpse. The priest slumped to the floor as Mark felt a sudden draft of air.

"The door!" Otto Spade cried. "Come on, Mark - -"

Then Otto rushed back toward the foot of the stairs, got one foot against Mandit Karr's chest and tugged at the sword-hilt. The sword came loose with a terrible scraping sound and Otto Spade swung it once in a bright swift arc and the unconscious priest's head leaped from his shoulders. Mark turned away but Otto said:

"You didn't want a killer at your back, boy. Did you?"

"N-no," Mark said, fighting down sudden nausea. "You did what you had to."

Shoulder to shoulder, they went through the doorway. There was another flight of stairs, this one going up. It was carved in the living rock and seemed to rise endlessly, arcing tier on tier, toward the unseen sky. Mark climbed weaponless but Otto Spade car-

ried the still-bloody sword with him, holding the hilt loosely in his big hand, the bloody tip scraping occasionally against the rock steps. The sound reminded Mark of the noise the sword had made being withdrawn from Mandit Karr's body.

He didn't feel like a god now. He felt like anything but a god. He needed action to get his mind off the horror he had seen. He knew that - - and grimly knew he was going to get it. But would he be in time?

IN THE TOWER room of the shrine Bah-ch'nanq said: "Bring the girl to me."

One of the lesser priests dragged Susan across the room toward the fire. She struggled and tried to fight him off, but could not match his strength.

"Remove her garment," said the priest of Ch'nanq.

Susan fought furiously but felt her jumper torn from her. "You see," Bah-ch'nanq said, "we don't have to hurt you yet. First we send down this garment, then another article of clothing, and another. When we finish with what you are wearing, if they haven't realized we are not going to be bested, we will start on your body."

Despite the firelight, Susan's

face was very pale. "You're insane," she said. "You're absolutely insane."

Bah-ch'nanq slapped her face without passion. Against the white of her skin a red welted handprint appeared. "Insane?" he repeated her word. "I think not. Desperate, devout - -"

"Devout?" Susan screamed, wondering why she even bothered to stall for time, knowing no one could help her here. "You call yourself devout?"

Bah-ch'nanq said something and one of the lesser priests went through the doorway with the girl's jumper. That left two lesser priests and Bah-ch'nanq himself, with Susan.

"We must not be driven from our world," the high priest said. "Last time we went like sheep - - and what happened? Now they tell us we must go again."

"But your sun is going to explode. It isn't a question of heat. It won't burn this world. It will vaporize it!"

"If the god-sun is angry," began Bah-ch'nanq, "and if we offer him a sacrifice your - -"

He got no further. Behind the fire, something stirred. Rock grated on rock. One of the lesser priests unsheathed his sword and rushed around the fire. There was the clang of metal on metal. Sparks

flew.

"Mark!" Susan cried in disbelief.

UNARMED, Mark ran toward them as the second priest drew his sword. Mark crouched, drew a brand from the fire, hurled it full in the priest's face and saw him scream and fall back. He heard a hoarse shout behind him and did not know if Otto Spade or his Purnamese antagonist had been impaled.

"Mark! Look out, he's got a knife!"

The knife gleamed in Bah-ch'nanq's hand, red with the light of the fire. He crouched before Mark, holding the knife below his waist loosely, expertly, ready to slash upward with it. Mark wished he had held the brand.

"You!" the high priest bellowed hysterically. "False god! You're responsible! You - -"

And he rushed at Mark, slashing upward with the knife.

Mark felt the blade sear against his ribs and felt the warm surge of blood down his flank. Then he was grappling with the old man, who possessed wild, incredible strength.

They fought back and forth before the fire, Mark intent on the wrist of the hand that held the knife, trying to keep it away from

his body. Bah-ch'nanq belabored Mark's face with his free hand, punching, clawing, ripping for the eyes with stiff fingers.

Mark stumbled and fell, feeling the old priest's bony strength come down on top of him, feeling the bite of the knife blade against his throat. They lay there for a moment, unmoving, the knife digging a little valley in the muscle wall of Mark's throat but not piercing the skin, both Mark's hands on the arm that wielded the blade

Then Bah-ch'nanq's legs began to drum, the knees digging painfully into Mark's abdomen and groin. The knife pressed deeper, puncturing skin. There was a roaring in Mark's ears and a picture flashed before his eyes as time seemed suspended of the triumphant high priest parading before his people the corpse of the false god. If that happened, two hundred million Purnamese would perish because they would not obey the Operation Disaster evacuation orders, the Earthmen would also be slaughtered, and Anson Chan-ning's name would never be honored

Mad eyes hovered inches over Mark's. Spittle dribbled down on his face as, milimeter by milimeter, the knife bit deeper. Mark kicked out with his legs and for a moment

the knife was withdrawn as Babch'nanq screamed in pain and surprise. Mark used the single moment he had to grasp the light but powerful body with both his hands and heave as he simultaneously kicked up again with his legs.

Screaming, Bah-ch'nanq plunged into the fire.

He rolled over, still screaming, and got to his knees in the flames. He crawled and lifted one hand, still holding the knife. Then the flames enveloped him and he seemed to shrivel in their fiery embrace.

All at once there was a charnal smell in the room. Susan came to Mark as he stood up, and swooned against him. Mark held her, supporting her weight on his arm, and looked beyond the fire. One of the lesser priests was dead. The other, his hand in the air over his head and a look of fear on his face, had been disarmed. Panting and bleeding from a cut on the cheek, Otto Spade watched him warily.

"Let's go down there," Mark said.

"They'll accept you now, boy," Otto Spade predicted. "As their god."

"If it will help, then let them."

Otto Spade nodded. "Then let them," he repeated the words. "If only Hurley Jamison had let them

do that twenty years ago, all this wouldn't have happened. They'll do anything you say, boy. Anything at all. They'll evacuate this world."

"They'd better," Mark said. "And fast."

Trailing behind their prisoner, who would tell how the god's magic had been stronger than the high-priest's, and leading a dazed Susan Jamison, Mark and Otto Spade went downstairs and outside to the waiting throngs of Purnamese.

Otto Spade was right.

They worshipped Mark Channing as a god.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXPLOSION was awesome.

It was not meant for human eyes. It could not be understood by human intellect. It was a sun going up in a millisecond in a blaze of energy that equalled all the energy given forth in that same millisecond by all the stars of the galaxy.

Supernova!

Mark stood with Otto Spade, Captain MacCready, Dr. Culcross and Susan Jamison on the observation deck of the Operation Disaster ship, watching it. Several weeks had passed - weeks in which, following their god, the

Purnamese had obediently embarked in the fleet of rescue ships which had been waiting for them since the last evacuation. Technicians were even now administering suspended animation, so that a race of people could be preserved until a new home somewhere in the depths of space was found for them.

"How can you ever forgive us?" Susan asked Mark. "All of us. We've been so cruel."

"Cruel, hell," said Captain MacCready. "Thanks to my bull-headedness, we had a mutiny on our hands."

Otto Spade smiled. "But it didn't last when they saw that mob of Purnamese coming down on the ship, with me and Mark at their head."

Dr. Culcross nodded. "There were fatalities, though. Men died"

"What gets me," Otto Spade said, "is how they'll go unpunished. The ones who did it, I mean. A man can't spend two life

sentences in prison."

"These men won't even get to spend one," MacCready said. "I never had a chance to tell you. When the counter-mutiny broke out, the original mutineers were torn to pieces."

For a while they stood in silence, watching the incandescent death of a star. Already all the Purnamese planets had been vaporized. Already the vast cloud of gas which had been a sun was speeding out into space at near-light speed and would, in another few hundred years, form a nebula.

"There seems to be a likely planet circling the star Fok-Dennier 14," Dr. Culcross said. "We're going out there to investigate. It ought to make a new home for these poor people, and give them a chance to find civilization again."

Death, Mark thought, and life in its wake. The human cycle.

"What will we call the new world?" Susan asked.

"Why, Purname, of course," Mark said, and took her hand.

THE END

**DON'T MISS THE CURRENT ISSUE OF IMAGINATION
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FOREVER WE DIE!

by C. H. THAMES

A SUSPENSE-FILLED NOVEL OF INTER-GALACTIC ADVENTURE



Poetry In Science



IT is unfortunate that too often the conception is held that geometry is a bare-boned skeleton out of a musty past, a skill with which all students must struggle and as devoid of all but the most trivial values as a chess game.

But this is not true.

Geometry, from the "Elements" of Euclid, through Poncelet's "Projections" and to modern topology, is a vital and living part of science and engineering. A modern rocket, a vase, an automobile—are geometrical configurations not compounded

of formulas, but beautiful lines.

The proof of a theorem, when looked at through the mathematicians' eyes, is a poem in logic. It is possible to become passionate about the art too; Archimedes, it was said of, "... was ravished with the sweet enticements of this siren ..."

If you want to understand the complexities of this world or atomic energy, rockets, orbits, servomechanisms and the host of other "unfathomable" things, apply yourself to geometry!



"Is the doc in, beautiful?"



It was to be Ralph's first visit to an alien world when his father sent for him on the red planet. But he hadn't been warned—

You'll Go Mad On Mars!

by

C. H. James

WITH A GROWING sense of alarm, Ralph Harper listened to the wind keening across the Syrtis Major space-field on Mars.

He was a fourteen year old Earth boy bundled to his ears in furs and he was becoming more frightened every moment. He looked at his chrono for the tenth time. It was 18:35, Mars Central Time. The driver from the Institute, where Ralph Harper's father worked as resident psychologist, was already an hour late. Ralph had come to Mars on the monthly liner to spend his summer vacation with Dr. Harper. It was his first look at the bleak ochre flats and the scrubby lichen clinging to the otherwise bare and wind-leveled rocks. It was also Ralph's first look at any extra-terrestrial world. He wondered what had happened to the driver from the Mental

Institute. He wondered why no one had notified him of the delay. He wondered what he should do.

There was a small shack about a quarter of a mile across the ochre tundra, a way-station for incoming passengers awaiting the sand-sleds, the tractors and the helicopters of the various Martian settlements. For a while Ralph had waited there in the tin-and-corrugated-iron shack, but the stares and blank, unfriendly silence of the native Martians had finally driven him outside into the windblown wilderness.

My mistake, he thought ruefully. Why should a driver from the Institute look for me out here? You'd have to be crazy to stay out here in the cold. He's probably inside now, warming himself at the electric heater in there, wondering what's happened to me. And, smiling at his own foolish-

ness, Ralph trudged across the ochre tundra to the shack. Shielded in the lee of the side of the building was a sandsled, driverless, waiting. You see? Ralph told himself. That sled will be for you, you dope. Instead of getting numb with cold out here, you should have waited where you belonged, in the way-station. You'd probably have been at the Institute right now, saying hello to Dad.

Ralph took a breath and opened the door of the shack. A blast of cold air drove him inside and he had difficulty closing the door behind him. The green-skinned Martian proprietess, her ample posterior toasting at the electric heater, looked at him and said nothing.

There were two Martian boys about Ralph's own age sitting on a bench along the opposite wall. They did not seem to mind the fact that the shack was heated unevenly and they were sitting on the cold side. They hardly seemed to be dressed warmly enough for the outside, but they had no other garments.

"Are you from the sled?" Ralph said in English. Since the coming of Earthmen to Mars seventy-five years ago, English was taught at all the Martian schools. Naturally the green-skinned natives did not speak it so well as they spoke

the Mars-wide koine, but most of them could understand and make themselves understood.

"It's my sled," one of the Martian boys said.

"It's mine!" challenged the other.

"That's all right," Ralph said. "I'm sure it will hold the three of us. I'm Ralph Harper. Did my Dad send you?"

THEY LOOKED at him. They were silent and leering, waiting for him to say more. He said, a little unsure of himself: "You *are* from the Institute, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the first boy.

"But I'm the driver," insisted the second boy. He shoved his hip against the first boy. The first boy slid off the end of the bench and fell on his rump on the hard floor. He got up and yelled something in Martian koine and the second boy yelled something back at him. They began to fight.

"I'm sure we can settle this amicably," Ralph suggested. Both boys turned on him, fists flailing. The big Martian woman removed herself reluctantly from the proximity of the electric heater and stalked, armed with a broom, into the fracas. In a moment she had cleared the ring of participants and Ralph stood in one corner nursing a bloody nose. "I'm sorry,"

he told the woman. "You were justified."

She grunted and said something in Martian and went back to her heater. "I'll take you to the sled," the first boy told Ralph. The second boy looked at his companion and laughed. Both of them went outside with Ralph.

"Who's the driver?" the second boy asked. The wind blew sand and rock-chips like stinging little pellets in Ralph's face.

"Me," said the first boy. The second boy hit him. The first boy fell down, rolled over in the sand and got up clutching a rock bigger than his fist.

"Who's the driver now?" he asked in a loud, menacing voice.

"Me," said the first boy.

The second boy hit him with the rock. The first boy did not even scream. He fell down as if he had never had the power to stand up. He fell down as if he was stuffed with rags and straw. He lay stretched out on the rust-colored sand. The side of his head was squashed. Ralph looked, and turned away, trying not to be sick.

"You - - you killed him," Ralph said.

"Get into the sled, please," the boy said. "My name is Ahlim. I will take you to the Institute, yes?"

Ralph looked at the bloody rock in the boy's hand. Forced to breathe their air from a tenuous atmosphere from birth, forced to survive on a harsh world, endowed with great chest, shoulder and arm development, the Martians were powerful creatures. The boy had killed once, almost on a whim. Ralph knew that the murder had to be reported but decided that in this case discretion *was* the better half of valor and the murder could be reported once he reached the safety of the Institute.

"Let's go," he said, and climbed onto the sled. It was a flat sheet of plastic with an upcurving front and a double bushel-basket cockpit arrangement, like a soap-box wagon. There was a steering rope leading to the front cockpit. The Martian climbed in there and Ralph settled down stiffly behind him. The body of the other Martian boy looked very lonely on the tundra.

"Ready?" Ahlim asked.

Doubtfully, Ralph said that he was. He felt the tiny jets thrum, shaking the frail vehicle. Then they sped away at dizzying speed across the sand, the sled furrowing the powdery ochre stuff of the Martian tundra, the wind whipping at them, the sand flying at them, the cold knifing them. Inside of five minutes, Ralph was numb.

THE JOURNEY seemed to take hours. Mostly, it was over featureless, flat marscape. One mile could have been the one before or the one after or the next hundred. All Ralph saw was the Martian's broad back and the retreating vista of barren ochre wilderness. Occasionally, a small hillock rose abruptly out of the sand, or a cairn-like mound of rocks. They were so few and so startlingly unexpected, they looked like Mount Ararat against the flat Armenian plain.

Finally, when Ralph had given up hope of ever seeing anything but the changeless ochre flats, a low jumble of buildings came up over the horizon and rushed toward them. The Martian horizon, of course, was incredibly close, thanks to the planet's small diameter. The buildings seemed old and run-down, a dark, broken silhouette against the pale blue sky. Ralph could see no activity there. The buildings might have stood that way for five hundred years. As the sled came closer, in fact, Ralph saw that some of the structures were indeed run-down, crumbling, half falling apart. Probably this wasn't the Institute after all. Probably it was a hoary ruin from some early time when Mars had been able to boast of a civilization. Probably the city on the sand was

as old as the great Pyramids on Earth . . .

But the sled slowed down and Ralph realized he no longer felt the thrum of the small jet engine. Pretty soon they came to a stop near one of the largest of the ancient sandstone edifices. Ahlim got off the sled and waited for Ralph. Stiffly, the Earthboy stood up.

"Is *this* the Institute?" he managed to say.

"Sure," said Ahlim proudly, earnestly. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

Ralph shivered with cold. Except for the cold, he might have been willing to argue the point. As it was, though, he could think of nothing more important than getting inside out of the gathering Martian night which had already brought darkness down on the ochre tundra like a cloak.

They went to the building. There was no door, although there once might have been. With his guide, Ralph walked through a sandstone archway, chipped, cracked and uneven, into a large courtyard off which several passageways led.

"Which one?" Ahlim asked abruptly.

"What did you say?"

"Which one? Which passage will you choose?"

"Just tell my Dad I'm here. Dr.

Harper?"

"When I first came I selected the one on the far left myself. I will tell you: I was not disappointed. And yourself?"

Ralph looked doubtfully at the dark passageways. He could not see more than three or four feet into each one. "I think I'll just wait here for Dad," he said.

"Aren't you hungry?"

Yes. He *was* hungry. His last meal had been on the Marsliner, before planetfall. He was cold and he was all but famished. "Well," he asked, "do you have a cafeteria or a dining room or something?"

"I'll take you," said Ahlim, "but first you'll have to choose one of the passages. It is written."

"What do you mean, written?"

"In the bylaws of the Institute."

Ralph had not mentioned the dead boy since the start of their sand-sled journey. He wasn't going to mention him now, not when Ahlim apparently did not care or did not remember. Time enough when he saw his father.

"I guess if I have to I have to," Ralph said doubtfully. He had decided it was best to humor Ahlim. Perhaps Ahlim was a kind of trusty of the Mental Institute, a mental patient who had been considered sufficiently cured to have an outside job, like sled- driv-

er. Perhaps whoever had made that evaluation of Ahlim's case had been wrong.

"Well?" said Ahlim, leering at him.

Ahlim had suggested the far-left passage. Apparently there was something special about that one. Ralph shook his head, undecided. Special - - but what? Shrugging, Ralph decided on the passage on the extreme right of the courtyard. He took a deep breath, walked over there, and boldly went inside.

At first he could see nothing. He heard Ahlim's feet scraping stone behind him. Ahlim was laughing softly in anticipation of something.

Finally a light flashed on. It was electric and the presence of electricity in this jumble of sand-stone buildings surprised Ralph.

There was a loud crackling in front of him, where the passage turned at right angles. All at once Ahlim was silent, waiting. Footsteps shuffled toward them and a fantastically old man, older than Methusekah, Ralph thought unbelievably, approached from around the bend in the passageway. He could barely walk. At every step Ralph thought his hands, not half a dozen inches from the ground because he walked stooped over and leaning from the waist, would actually scrape the stone.

His face was a holocaust of dried, withered flesh and sagging, toothless mouth and sunken, tiny eyes and absolutely no hair on a small shriveled skull which seemed hardly bigger than a baseball. His skin was the palest green Ralph had ever seen on a Martian.

"Masters?" he said in a quivering voice.

Ahlim came forward confidently: "You're his Dad."

"Son," said the ancient man tremulously, tears starting in his eyes and rolling down his leathery cheeks. "Son - - at last!"

He came at Ralph, who was so startled that he did not step aside. The old man hugged him. He felt as dry and as light as a blown leaf. His tears warmed Ralph's shoulder. "Son," he said. "Son, son"

Ralph pulled free of him. The old man had a musty, disagreeable smell, like dried, withered parchment. "Stop it," Ralph said. The old man began to blubber. "Stop that blubbering. You're not my Dad and you know it."

The old man shrugged, stopped crying, turned around and left, disappearing around the bend in the passageway. "I thought you said you were looking for your Dad," Ahlim told Ralph accusingly.

"I am, Dr. Harper. *The* Dr.

Harper of the Institute."

"Oh. Oh, I see. Shall we try another passage?"

"No. Absolutely not. I want you to tell Dr. Harper I'm here and I want you to tell him now."

Ahlim shook his head. "But that's impossible."

"What do you mean, it's impossible?" Wild thoughts chased each other through Ralph's mind: a revolution of the inmates here at the Institute, the inmates taking over, the staff - - including Ralph's Dad - - prisoners or possibly killed.

"It's impossible because we have to eat first. Will you join me at the dining hall?"

Ralph shook his head. "Dr. Harper," he said.

Ahlim shrugged and reached inside his robe to scratch the skin of his chest. At least, he seemed to be scratching the skin of his chest. But when his hand appeared again he was holding a knife with a long, rusty blade. "You see the darker areas of the blade?" he asked Ralph.

Ralph looked. The rust did seem to be unevenly colored.

"That is blood. Stones or knives, it is all the same. You remember the way-station?"

"Yes," Ralph said, his heart pounding.

"People sometimes don't listen

to me. They ought to listen to me. They always ought to listen. You'll come to the dining hall now, my Earth friend?"

The knife wavered inches in front of Ralph's face. It made a pass through air, slicing off an imaginary nose. Ahlim looked at the invisible nose in his hand sympathetically, then shrugged, dropped it on the floor and pretended to step on it, grinding it against the stone with his heel. His gestures were so realistic that Ralph almost expected to see something on the ground. But naturally there was nothing.

Ralph said, his throat tight: "Let's go eat."

THE DINING room was not crowded. It was a large place but apparently the dinner hour was ended. Only two of the many long tables seemed to be occupied and Ahlim made his way toward one of these. A naked woman sat there, eating soup noisily. "How do you like my new dress, Ahlim?" she asked proudly.

"Stand up and pirouette so I can see it," Ahlim suggested.

The naked woman got up and turned slowly, then did a curtsy with air and sat down. "Like it?"

"The pleats in front particularly," said Ahlim. "It's very lovely.

But isn't the hem perhaps an inch or so too long?"

"I was thinking of that," the woman said, and returned to her soup.

"What's on the menu for tonight?" Ahlim asked.

"Poison," said the woman, eating noisily.

"Yes, but what kind?"

At first Ralph had turned away blushing when he saw the woman. But now, fascinated, he was listening to their conversation. They spoke with such matter-of-factness that he found it hard not to take part in the conversation on their terms.

"My favorite," the woman said. "Strychnine. It's a systemic poison, you know."

"Yes. I remember my last seizure. Stiff neck, locked jaw, twitching, spasms, finally convulsions before they got me out of it."

"It must have been lovely," said the woman with a touch of envy. She finished her soup and sat there. Ahlim sat down. The waiter came over. He was a small, young Martian. He looked perfectly sane. Mechanically, Ralph found himself sitting down too.

"Yes, men?" the waiter said.

"Strychnine soup," said Ahlim.

"Have your joke," the waiter said.

"Strychnine soup," repeated Ah-

lim, brandishing his knife.

"Strychnine soup," said the waiter.

"With onions," said Ahlim. "I like my strychnine soup with onions."

Just then the naked woman fell off her seat and rolled on the floor, clutching her neck, trembling and writhing. "She's been poisoned!" Ahlim screamed. "What kind of a place is this?"

"She has not been poisoned," insisted the waiter.

Foam flecked the woman's mouth. She writhed and seemed to curl up on the floor. Then she lay still. But suddenly she opened one eye and looked at Ahlim. "What did you say the antidote was?" she asked.

"Potassium permanganate and chloral, if given immediately," said Ahlim promptly. He turned to the waiter. "Bring some potassium permanganate and chloral, please."

The waiter leered. "Will you have strychnine soup too?" he asked. He was looking at Ralph.

"I - - I'm not hungry," Ralph said.

"You'll eat," said Ahlim. Then he told the waiter: "At least send for a doctor."

"While I get the strychnine soup," said the waiter, and departed.

"Hungry?" Ahlim asked Ralph.

The Martian was carving something on the table top with his knife.

"Not at all," said Ralph.

The knife flicked at the wood. Splinters shot at Ralph, stinging the skin of his face. The knife point pointed at him from a distance of two feet. "You'll eat," said Ahlim.

After a while the waiter came back with two steaming bowls of soup. He set them down on the table. Their contents were a foul gray-purple color. Ahlim picked up his spoon and began to eat noisily, happily. Ralph looked at his bowl and did not touch his spoon. The soup had a vaguely nut-like aroma.

Just then a man in a dark suit came rushing over. "Did anyone ever hear of Dr. Harper?" he asked. He was carrying a little black bag. He was a Martian. Ralph had never seen him before.

"Yes!" Ralph cried. "That's my Dad."

"Interesting," said the man with the black bag. "I thought I had heard the name. I am Dr. Harper. Now, where's the patient?"

"You're not my Dad and you know it!" Ralph said, his voice breaking. This, he told himself, was the last straw. He had to get out of here, had to go to the authorities for help . . .

The "doctor" bent over the woman on the floor and opened his black bag. The bag was empty. He pretended to take something out and place an end of it against the woman's chest. He shook his head slowly and stood up. "Bury the instruments with her," he said to no one in particular, "that woman is dead."

Two waiters came and carted out the body. The "doctor" said: "Well, so long, son."

Ralph did not answer. His soup was no longer steaming. He stood up abruptly. Ahlim leaped to his feet too. "Stay where you are!" he cried.

Instead of answering, Ralph upended the long table and pushed it down on top of Ahlim and ran. He heard a startled oath from the Martian but did not turn to see if Ahlim was following him. He sprinted across the large dining room and down the passageway through which they had entered. These people were crazy. It didn't matter if he had come to the wrong place or had come to the right place, only to see the inmates take over. He had to get out of here for help. He had to get out with his life.

"I'll kill you!" Ahlim screamed. Ahlim was following him, all right. He heard Ahlim pounding through the corridor behind him. He felt

suddenly breathless. He could not run further. It was the lack of air, he realized. It took years to grow accustomed to the tenuous Martian atmosphere. But Ahlim's enormous chest and lung capacity made the difference. Ahlim could run all day in air like this if his legs held out.

Ralph staggered on, stumbling from wall to wall of the narrow passageway. He could not catch his breath. He could not go another hundred yards and he knew it. There was no sense in fooling himself. He was just a fourteen year old kid way out of his depth and scared half out of his life . . .

He stumbled and fell, sprawling heavily and painfully on the stone floor. Feet pounded behind him. There was a triumphant whoop and Ahlim was leaning over him, the knife at his throat. The point pricked painfully. Ralph gagged.

"You didn't obey me," Ahlim told him. "I said you should eat. You disobeyed. You shouldn't have. I don't like for people to disobey me. I'm going to have to kill you, as I killed Ranjui when he wanted to drive the sled."

Ralph could think of absolutely nothing. His mind was a blank. He wondered how many seconds he had to live. The knife point dug a little deeper. He tried to

get up but his run through the oxygen-starved air had weakened him to the point where he could offer no resistance. Ahlim held him pinned down effortlessly.

"Wait!" Ralph said. His mind began to function again. You could never fight fire any other way: you had to fight fire with fire.

"Yes? One short speech. That's fair enough. Then I kill you."

"The soup," Ralph said desperately, trying to keep his voice from breaking.

"What about the soup?"

"It was strychnine soup," Ralph said.

"I don't remember ordering strychnine soup."

"Don't lie to me. I was right there. And you saw what happened to the naked woman."

"Aha!" Ahlim said triumphantly. "There was no naked woman!"

"I mean the woman with the beautiful dress. She died - - of strychnine poisoning - - the same as you ate."

Ahlim scowled, then clutched his throat. His eyes rolled. He fell over on his side and lay there trembling. The knife clattered on the stone beside him.

Ralph got up and began to run. He felt a little better now but couldn't run very far and knew it. But as he remembered they were very close to the courtyard

now and the archway which would lead outside to the sand sled. Then he heard Ahlim getting up. Ahlim yelled: "I was lucky. Sometimes it's just a minor seizure!"

Ralph looked back. Ahlim was chasing him with the knife, and gaining fast.

Outside Ralph plunged, into the sudden, unexpected cold of the courtyard. The cold air revived him, gave him added strength. He heard Ahlim coming out after him but didn't turn back. He went through the archway to the sand sled. He sat down in the front cockpit and fumbled with the controls. Ahlim came up behind him, knife poised.

The jets thrummed.

Ahlim leaned down, the knife streaking toward Ralph's back.

And then the jet streaked away across the sand, taking Ralph - - but Ahlim too. Ahlim clung to the rear cockpit but was not seated. He clung by one powerful arm. He brandished the knife in the other. He made stabbing motions with the knife. He screamed something but the sound of it was drowned by the keening wind. And then he let go and became a dot on the sand and disappeared. In another few moments the jumble of ruined buildings faded back to the horizon, and then over it.

Reaction set in. Ralph, a four-

teen year old boy who had come close to violent death, was wracked by sobs.

He was still sobbing when the sled reached the spaceport way-station. He got out stiffly and headed for the shack. He would report all that happened to the woman inside. She would know what to do. She . . .

"Dad!" he said, and rushed into the big man's arms.

Dr. Harper held his son, comforting him, patting his back. "Take it easy," he said. "Be all right now, Ralph." He spoke. Ralph was hysterical and so the words meant nothing to him right then and so he did not understand. But he remembered what his father said and later, of course, the words made perfect sense.

"You see," Dr. Harper had explained to his son, "there are *two* mental institutes here on Mars, here in Syrtis Major. That's why our work at the Earth Mental Institute is so important. Like many primitive peoples, the Martians stand in awe of the insane. They make only a feeble attempt to confine them. That other Institute you visited is the feeble attempt and in it every day are murders and rapes and violence and it's all, unfortunately, perfectly legal.

"Anyhow, we sent old Farr Skapp, our driver, to pick you up.

A little while ago Skapp called. He'd been beaten, bound and gagged by two boys from the *other* Institute.

"I rushed down here as fast as I could. We found one of the boys murdered and I began to worry. We were getting ready to go after you, when you came along. Care to talk about it?"

"Later," Ralph croaked.

"Hungry, boy?"

"And cold," Ralph nodded eagerly.

They went into the shack and had steaming coffee. Dr. Harper said: "It's why my work on Mars is so important. Our way is the Earth way of caring for the mentally ill. Help them. Treat them. Try to understand them. The Martians, in *their* Institute, simply give the insane an abandoned old city to live in and make their own laws in and do what they wish. We're trying to show them our way's better. I think we're going to succeed. Well, ready to go to the Institute now?"

Ralph nodded. They went outside toward a larger sand-sled. It was very cold out there, and dark. But somehow now Ralph no longer minded the cold. He was on Mars. Another world. And there was much to learn. In time, he hoped, he would also be able to help. Maybe even Ahlim . . .

"I'll Think You Dead!"

by

Paul W. Fairman

Sam Courtney had a job on his hands when he tried to make any sense out of six identical murders. Then suddenly along came number seven!

A UNIFORMED patrolman answered the door. Sam said, "Courtney — Homicide." The patrolman touched his cap and walked on in.

The body lay half across the lounge in the living room. She had been around thirty, Courtney estimated. Blonde hair; pretty. She wore pajamas under a negligee and had obviously been killed by a savage blow to the base of the skull. The murder weapon lay on the floor — a thin metal base designed to hold a single, long-stemmed flower.

After the two squad-car men turned the case over to him and left, Sam Courtney made a tour of the apartment. This didn't take long. A foyer, a pullman kitchen, a living room, a bedroom.

"Nothing's been touched, Lieutenant," the patrolman said. He was young and ill-at-ease and kept touching his cap.

Courtney, scarcely hearing him, went over and snapped off the television set just as some comedian was leading into a joke with: "My wife and I don't get along - - -"

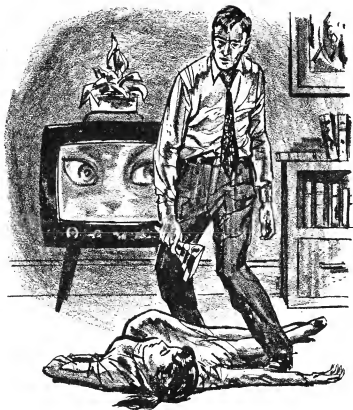
"Everything as it was, you say?"

"That's right, sir. The lady next door — just coming home — heard the scream. Then she saw Mr. Davis run out of the apartment in his shirt sleeves. While she was calling the police — after looking through the open door — the elevator boy ran out in the street and called me."

Courtney regarded the dead woman with compassion and weariness. What caused things like this? He had often wondered. The pressures of city life? The unnatural drive of modern living?

"Thanks," Courtney said. "You can go back to your beat. I'll call the lab men."

The patrolman touched his cap and left . .



AN HOUR LATER, Courtney was sitting in the office of Bart Henderson — hard-bitten Chief of Detectives. Courtney passed a hand over his forehead and the look in his eyes was that of a dazed man. "Maybe you'd

better give it to me again. I was out on the first one — the Dalmar murder — when the rest of them came in — "

Henderson regarded Courtney with sympathy. "Go ahead and say it, Sam. I understand."

"Say what, Chief?"

"That it's impossible to believe at the first telling. After all the data was in, I read the whole thing three times. I guess I still don't believe it."

"What were the other five names?"

Henderson stared at the ceiling, and as though to inform himself more so than Courtney, began talking:

"Tonight between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock — "

Courtney glanced at his watch. "It's two a. m. now."

"All right — *last* night between those hours, six men brutally murdered their wives. Two were apprehended — four are still at large. Their names were Jones, Williams, Sternberg, Halverson, Dalmar, and Smith. Initial checks show these men to be without criminal records of any kind. We have, at the moment, every reason to believe they were very ordinary, average respected citizens. The six murders had several things in common."

Henderson ticked off the points of similarity on his fingers as he went on: "They were performed by smashing blunt objects against the skulls of the six dead women. They were all performed within the aforementioned hour. All the killers were childless. In each case

the dead women were the first wives of the murderers — by that I mean there had never been a divorce in any of the histories. Nor have we been able, as yet, to discover any rifts or trouble in the marital relations of any of the husbands and wives."

Henderson stopped and leaned back and sighed. "So," he summed up, "what do we have at the moment? Six devoted, law-abiding husbands brutally murdering their wives last night."

Courtney duplicated Henderson's sigh — also his scowl. "Did any of the men know each other?"

"Not that we've discovered. Oh — and one more thing. There is no pattern whatever to the locations. The six residences are scattered indiscriminately around the city."

"The specifications you outlined are wrong," Courtney said.

"Wrong?"

"They have to be. As stated, the whole massacre makes no sense. The connecting link isn't there — and it's got to exist."

"Then let's say, rather, that the data is incomplete, and it's up to you to find this link you speak of."

Sam Courtney was startled. "Up to me?"

"That's what I said. No use sending six detectives out on this thing. It's got to be handled as a single case. You'll get all the help

you need, but you'll be in charge."

"And I'll be responsible," Courtney said glumly.

"That usually follows."

Courtney got up from his chair. "You say two of them were captured?"

"Smith and Williams."

"I guess that's where I start," Courtney said . . .

CLARENCE SMITH was a small, pale man with watery blue eyes. Courtney, seated opposite, regarded him with somber impersonality. Crouched there in his chair, the little man looked anything but a murderer.

"You admit killing your wife?"

"I — I killed her."

"You'll sign a statement to that effect?"

"Yes — yes. I'll plead guilty. I want them to send me to the chair. I don't want to live, now."

"Why did you kill her?"

"I don't know. I must have gone crazy."

"Did you have an argument?"

Smith shook his head. "No — no. I tell you we were just sitting there not doing anything but watching television. Then suddenly I picked up that bookend and hit her with it. I don't know why!" Smith put his hands over his face and rocked back and forth in an agony of despair.

"Think carefully, Mr. Smith. There must be something. You're not insane. You're an intelligent man."

Courtney waited. Was his approach wrong? Would hardboiled tactics get him further? Somehow, he didn't think so.

Smith licked his thin lips. He tried to raise his eyes to those of Courtney and failed. "There — there was something — I think."

"What, Mr. Smith?"

"It's so unbelievable, that I —" He raised his eyes sharply. "For that moment — while I sat there watching the television show — *I hated Clara!* There was something in my mind telling me I would be better off without her! It was horrible. But it didn't seem horrible at the time. Then — then I got up and killed her."

Smith broke down and Courtney gave him a minute to compose himself. After which Smith lowered his hands and said, "I won't sign a statement admitting the sudden hatred though. I won't ever admit it again."

"Why not if it's the truth?"

"Because then they might think I'm insane and then they won't send me to the chair." His expression turned almost crafty. "I'm going to tell them I hated Clara — that I *planned* for a long time to kill her."

"Why will you tell them that?"

"Because then it will be premeditation and they'll *have* to electrocute me."

Courtney got up and stood staring down at the unhappy little man. "Take him back. Bring Williams in."

The guard complied. Williams was a small, pale man with watery blue eyes. He looked anything but a murderer . . .

AT APPROXIMATELY this same time, a seventh man in the city was putting the final touches on a plan to murder his wife. However, he differed from the previous six in that this would be no spur of the moment killing. He differed in other ways, also. Where the preceding half-dozen had been men of very ordinary appearance, this one — Wilton Michener — could have been a matinee idol. He was over six feet tall; he had wavy black hair and clear, arresting black eyes. He had a beautiful wife; and he hated her because she was jealous of his every move. She had the power to make her jealousy dangerous to him — financial power — in that she had brought a great deal of capital into the marriage. So — alive — she barred him from any number of delectable women and from the money which would allow him to

afford them.

Therefore, he wanted her dead and had made the necessary arrangements. He had planned the thing very carefully and was just now making a final appraisal.

A bass viol player in a popular musical trio, Wilton Michener worked at the Blue Heron, a popular night spot, until four A. M. At dinner that night, he had put a mild opiate into his wife's coffee. At two o'clock, he took a cigarette break, hurried home, smashed his wife's skull as she lay in bed, and returned to his job. This was accomplished in a total lapsed time of fifteen minutes.

Now he stood in the bedroom looking over the scene with intense, but impersonal interest. The bloody bed, the window open to the fire escape. The heavy glass vase that would show no fingerprints.

Michener took a last, long look. Then he went to the phone, called the police and went into his act . . .

SAM COURTNEY was reporting to Chief of Detectives Henderson. Sam was bewildered and his spirits were low. "They're all accounted for now," he said. "The murderers, that is. Three came in and gave themselves up. The sixth one — Halverson — committed suicide half an hour ago in a cheap hotel room. He left

a confession."

"Get anything out of any of them?"

Courtney shrugged. "Every story is the same. They all admit the killings. None of them know why they did it. They're all sincerely horrified at their own actions. They all want to be executed."

Henderson scowled. "There's got to be a connection — a thread sewing them all together. The mathematical odds against six murders of identical type — "

"Seven."

"Right. But the killing of Clare Michener varies from the pattern."

"Yes, but — "

"Seems to me it varies enough to be figured out of the link we're looking for. Her husband didn't perform this one. He called the police when he got home and found her. Everything, in her case, points to a prowler."

"That's how it appears."

"In other words, there's nothing extraordinary about that one except — "

"Except that its timing coincides with the other six. It's either a single, unconnected murder or the last of a string of seven."

"I think it's one of a string of one."

"You may be right, but I'd like to add it to my half-dozen and take charge."

Henderson shrugged. "Okay. How many men are you using?"

"Four. I won't need any more."

Henderson regarded Courtney keenly for a moment. "Are you getting anywhere at all?"

"I don't know, frankly. I'm checking every point of similarity. That's where the answer's got to be. And one point fascinates me."

"What's that?"

"In every case, the television set was on when the murder occurred."

"Not too indicative. At that time, television sets were on all over the country."

"Right, but I can go a little further. At the time of our six murders, the sets were all tuned to the same program."

"That is quite a coincidence. What one?"

"A musical program. It — "

"But the seventh killing. The Micheners didn't own a TV set."

"You're right. However, there's still a damned interesting point involved. The musical program was a trio from The Blue Heron. The night spot where — "

Henderson's eyes popped in unbelief. " — Where Michener performs! He's the bass viol player!"

"Right. Still coincidences maybe but aren't we getting an awful lot of them?"

"But how the hell can that help

us? It doesn't *mean* anything."

"Not on the face of it but I'm sure going to keep it in mind . . ."

THE STENOGRAPHER Sam Courtney brought in to take a statement from Wilton Michener was a female — unusual, but not unheard-of in police stations. Her name was Peggy Carson and she had very nice legs and all the things that usually go with nice legs; an exceptionally pretty girl.

She was waiting with her pad when Michener was ushered in. Sam Courtney said, "This is pretty much a formality, Mr. Michener, but we'd like to get your statement down for the records. Do you mind?"

Michener looked at Peggy Carson's legs and said he didn't mind at all.

Sam took a couple of turns around the room, saw the direction of Michener's gaze, and made a mental note: *This guy is head over heels for women.* Sam said, "Just tell what happened in your own way, Mr. Michener."

Michener turned his eyes away from Peggy and allowed stunned sadness to fill his eyes. "She was so happy — so gay — at dinner. Possibly we drank a little too much champagne at dinner. We were both feeling good . . ."

His eyes had drifted unconscious-

ly back at Peggy's legs and were now moving up to her face. Sam watched musingly as Peggy, busy with her shorthand, stirred uneasily and met his gaze. Something came into her eyes then — Courtney couldn't be sure just what.

"Are you getting it all, Miss Carson?" Sam asked.

She uncrossed her legs guiltily. "Yes — yes sir. I'm getting it all down."

" . . . so if I'd just gotten home perhaps half an hour earlier she would be alive now. It—it was horrible. We'd planned to do so much together. You'll capture the swine, won't you officer? You'll get him?" Michener's eloquent eyes pleaded.

"We'll get 'him," Sam Courtney said.

"Will you want me for anything further at the moment?"

"No, I think not. We'll be in touch with you."

As Michener rose and left, Peggy Carson's eyes swiveled around, following him to the door. As the door closed, Sam stepped over and lifted her pad from her hands. He had a speaking acquaintance with shorthand. He said, "You've garbled these last notes pretty badly, Miss Carson."

This startled her and her surprise seemed genuine. She took the book, studied the notes and flushed with guilt and surprise. "Yes, I

guess I have. I don't quite know —"

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Michener?" Sam shot the question hard.

Peggy Carson blinked. "Why no — of course not. I never saw him before."

Sam took a turn around the room. He appeared to be pondering a problem. "That will be all. You may go now."

As she left, Sam glanced at his watch. Almost five o'clock. He stood for a moment, then snapped his fingers, grabbed his coat and hat, and left the building.

When Peggy Carson came out, Sam was lounging in a doorway close by. He fell in step behind her and they moved up the street. The girl was not hard to tail, never looking backward, moving straight toward some destination; and Sam got the feeling he could have caught up with her and walked beside her without fear of detection.

She crossed town, never hesitating, and turned into a shoddy, down-at-the-heel hotel on the fringe of the tenement district. Sam came in behind her and entered the place carefully. As he did so, he saw the elevator door just closing on the backs of a man and a woman. The woman was Peggy Carson. Sam wasn't sure about the man.

He approached the desk. "That girl who just came in. Did you know her?"

The clerk was an oldster with watery eyes and a cracked voice. "Never saw her before. Nice looking chick."

"Did she register?"

"Sure did. Everybody registers at this hotel." He turned the book and Sam read: *Miss Jane Doe*, done in neat feminine script.

"She didn't take a room?"

"Uh-uh. He said she'd do that later. She's a friend of his."

"Who's *he*?"

"Frank Smith. He keeps a room here."

"Does he have a lot of pretty friends like Miss Doe?"

"Sure does. But it's all legal. Everybody registers here."

Sam Courtney sat in the lobby for a while, formulating a theory that scared him. He rejected the theory, pushed it far away from him, then brought it back and began inspecting it again. Good lord! Could such a thing be possible? He reminded himself that this was the era of impossible things. An age of miracles. Atomic explosives; fantastically impossible drugs that actually worked; surgery that was little more than wizardry. Even television itself was a miracle of scientific imagination turned into reality.

Sam got up, his face grim, and went out into the street. He looked up at the windows of the hotel pretty sure he knew what was going on up there; wondering if he should break it up. His instincts said yes. But his professional training — his urge to catch a murderer — said wait and he obeyed this directive.

After a while, Peggy Carson came out of the hotel. Sam went closer than he should have, anxious to see her face. There was nothing much there. The girl's eyes were rather blank. They mirrored no horror, revulsion, nor regret. She appeared to be mildly dazed; definitely confused; as though asking herself questions she could not answer.

She left but Sam waited. A short time later, Wilton Michener emerged from the hotel, turned in another direction, and hurried away. After he'd disappeared, Sam walked slowly down the street and in his eyes was the look of a man who knew neither the place nor the time; a man lost in strange thought . . .

"I THINK I've got it solved,"
Sam said.

"Fine," Bart Henderson answered. "Bring in the killer and you'll get a promotion — maybe."

"It isn't as easy as that."

"You said you had it solved."

"Solving and proving are two different things." Sam slumped wearily into a chair and told his Chief about Peggy Carson and Wilton Michener and the cheap hotel.

Henderson said, "So they went to a hotel together. I'll have the girl fired, but to say there was previous collusion between Michener and a girl you just happened to bring in to record a statement is going too far, Sam."

"I'm not saying that."

"Then what are you saying? What's your solution to the case?"

"I can't give it to you yet."

"Then why are you shooting me all this detail?"

"I want to go on record. I'm going to try something pretty drastic to trap my man."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'd rather not go into that either."

"Listen here, Courtney —!"

Sam passed a hand over his forehead. "It's just if things backfire some way," he said stubbornly, "I don't want it to come as a complete surprise to you."

Henderson studied him thoughtfully. "Do you expect anything to go wrong?"

"I don't know. I hope not."

"I've got a lot of confidence in you, Sam."

"Thanks. I'll do my best."

"Need any more help?"

"As a matter of fact I do. That gal on the pickpocket detail. Hally Andrews."

Henderson half-smiled and whistled soundlessly. "You mean 'Dream Boat'?"

"Yeah. I guess that's what the boys call her."

"She rates it." Henderson's eyes turned vague. "Why a chick like that ever went into police work I'll never know."

"She's the one I want."

"Okay. I'll have her in your office this afternoon."

"Thanks."

Sam turned to leave. At the door he turned as Henderson said, "Sam?"

"Yes?"

Henderson was grinning. "Ask her if she's got a friend . . ."

IT WAS HARD of Sam to figure how Hally Andrews would be effective on the pickpocket detail. She stood out like a signal flare in a dark sky. He felt every pickpocket in the world would forget his business at sight of her.

She sat in his office waiting for orders and he found it hard to keep his mind on the subject at hand. Her auburn hair, breathtaking figure, and aura of mysterious sex, kept clouding his mind.

"This is a completely unorthodox assignment, Miss Andrews. One you can turn down if you want to."

"What is the assignment?"

"I want you to charm a killer into a confession."

Hally Andrews frowned. She met Sam's eyes frankly and said, "Mr. Courtney, I won't be coy. I know I'm damned good looking. Men have a tendency to go nuts about me and I know why. I've never used my — shall we call them gifts? — as weapons, and —"

"As I said, you can turn it down if you want to. But this is a very exceptional case. And the important thing is whether or not you've got the will power to stand up against a man not one woman in a thousand could resist."

"Either you're joking or —"

"I'm not joking. This man we're after has a power that is terrifying. I think he's actually an ignorant person and this thing of his is a talent. He has a mania for beautiful women and the chances are he will enslave you almost instantly."

"I'll take my chances on that," Hally Andrews said, coolly.

"Please. The one thing you mustn't do is underestimate him. Now, if you're interested, I'll give you the details."

"I'm very much interested . . ."

Hally Andrews sat alone at a table in the Blue Heron. The trio was not on the stand when she arrived and she recalled with some amusement, the concern of Sam Courtney. Where had he ever gotten the idea she could not handle a man? Of course, getting the information Courtney wanted would take a little time. But she would get it.

Then the three musicians came onto the small raised platform and she got her first look at Wilton Michener. He was busy with his music and his instrument and did not look her way. She used the time in studying him. Handsome, well-built. The job would not be distasteful, at any rate. But her sense of amusement and quiet competence remained.

Until he turned and put his eyes on her.

The effect was odd. Almost like a mild electric thrill. His eyes passed on, then stopped and jerked back, and it was as if a full current had been turned on and a signboard had blazed out across the night.

Hally was shocked and confused. She had never felt anything so strong as her sudden attraction to Wilton Michener. And she had to tell herself, *Listen, gal, take it easy. You're no idealistic school-*

girl from Three Oaks, Arkansas. You've got a job to do. Do it!

She smiled at Michener, forcing into the smile, just the right touch of friendliness. Left on her own, she would have made the smile warm and welcoming. The unit went into the opening bars of their first number. Michener's hands moved automatically, furnishing the beat. But his eyes and his thoughts were on Hally and she sat completely confused and bewildered from their effect . . .

NOW IT WAS three days later and Hally had gone through a peculiar kind of hell. For the first time in her life, saying goodbye to a man at her front door required effort. Sheer will power was her only ally and as the door closed on those demanding eyes, her sense of guilt was sharp.

But the worst came on the third night and she was just now recovering from the deep emotional effects. Her job, as she knew, was to get a confession of murder from Wilton Michener. Courtney, knowing what she faced, had been content that she had shown the courage to refuse Michener. This she had managed to do, but only by gripping her courage in both hands and repeating steadily to herself, *I'm not in love with him. He's a murderer. He killed his wife. I'm*

not in love with him.

But the yearning to take his handsome head to her bosom and say, *I'm yours—all yours—forever*, was almost overwhelming. He had left finally, evidently as confused and bewildered as Hally had been that first night in the Blue Heron. He'd said, "I won't take no for an answer. I'll see you tomorrow night. You're my woman and you know it."

After he left she broke into tears and now she raised her head as a hand touched her shoulder. Sam Courtney stood there a look of concern on his face. "It's been pretty rough, hasn't it?"

She arose, stark misery behind her tears. "Sam — Sam! Are you sure? Are you positive this is what you say it is?"

He nodded gravely. "Yes — I'm sure. And you are too, aren't you?"

She considered his question. "I'm sure the power lies in his eyes. I can't forget that first surge — the electric thrill when he — "

" — When he turned them on you. He wants you, Hally. He's wanted every pretty woman he ever met and you're the first one that has resisted him. He can't understand it and he's rattled. So, tomorrow night — "

She nodded bleakly. "Yes. If I have a little time to build up my resistance. But if he walked in

that door this instant I'm afraid I'd — "

He patted her on the shoulder. "I know, Hally. You're doing a magnificent job. I appreciate it a lot."

The flood of Hally's emotion was subsiding. She smiled. "I'll do my damndest, Sam."

He turned to go. "Don't forget your lines. They're corny, but I think they might be effective."

"I won't forget them . . . "

AND NOW HALLY sat in the living room of her apartment bearing the brunt of those incredibly magnetic eyes. Wilton Michener was saying, "I want you to marry me, Hally. I'm in love with you. You've got to marry me!"

Far in the back of Hally's mind was a truth Sam had given her. *He wants you so badly he'll do anything to get you. That's our ace in the hole. He wants you because it will be a terrible blow to his ego if he doesn't get you. So you know what to do.*

Hally started doing it. "I love you, Wilton, but I can't get over the feeling that there's something between us. I don't mind you're asking me so soon after your wife was killed. But I must know the truth, I must! Did you kill her, Wilton?"

He raised his head quickly,

looking deep into her eyes. She went on quickly. "I don't *care*, darling, believe me. Maybe I'm glad because I couldn't have you if she wasn't dead. But I've got to know the truth. Was there really a prowler?"

He licked his lips. "You mean you would marry me if I'd killed my wife?"

"You don't understand, darling. I'd marry you if you told me the *truth*. I don't care what the truth is. But I've got to be important enough to you to share your heart and your mind. However bad, the truth — I don't care! However terrible — we would fight together!"

"Yes — yes, Hally. I killed her!" And while she held him so he could not see her face, he poured out the whole shocking story. Detail upon detail, shock by shock. And Hally listened under the most terrific emotional strain of her life. The brutal story appalled her, but there was also the thought — *I'm betraying this man I love. Leading him into a trap. I'm playing Judas!*

Suddenly she could stand it no longer. She put her hand over his mouth and cried, "No! No — stop it darling! This is a trap! The room's wired. They're taking down your confession!"

Wilton Michener recoiled like a

trapped animal. At first, he refused to believe any woman could do this to him. But Hally ran to the wall and jerked down a picture revealing the hidden mike. "Run, darling! Run! Don't let them get you!"

Sam Courtney, listening from the next apartment, had gone into action the moment Hally cracked. Now he flung open the door and Michener whirled, found this exit blocked.

"The window, darling!" Hally cried. "The fire escape!"

Wilton Michener lunged toward the window, driven by pure panic. Sam drew his gun and raised it, his command to halt, drowned by Hally's screams. He would not have used the gun because the alley, below, was blocked, but Hally, not thinking clearly, grabbed his arm and pulled it down.

The final moment was over in a flash. Sam Courtney's bull-roar. "Not there — you fool! It's the wrong —"

Hally saw Michener out of the corner of her eye and screamed. "The other window, darling! You'll be killed!"

But Michener, plunging through while looking in terror over his shoulder, was alerted too late. And his last sound was a thin scream as he hurtled seven floors to his death . . .

SAM COURTNEY sat in Henderson's office. "It's over," he said.

Henderson replied, "You mean the seventh murder."

"I mean the whole series of seven murders." And before Henderson could protest, Sam's thoughts turned to Hally. "Poor kid. She did a magnificent job. She's snapping out of it and eventually it will be only a bad dream to her — I hope."

"Wait a minute — "

Sam smiled. "He was a fool. All he had to do was stand still. No jury could have convicted him — not with the power he had." Sam sobered. "We're lucky he died."

"Will you shut up and let me ask a question. You said the whole seven murders were solved. Will you tell me how?"

"I'll tell you, but you won't believe me."

"Try me."

Sam settled back to give his explanation. His manner was that of a man facing a task he dreaded. "This Michener had a power of hypnotism that was frightening — a power he did not know he possessed. He demonstrated it perfectly on the little stenographer. He could get anything he wanted in life, but he wasted his opportunity in a sense, because he only wanted one thing; women. And he

got them. The string must be miles long — all the women who stood powerless before those hypnotic eyes of his and that hypnotic mind. We're lucky he was such a fool — that he didn't realize his power. He no doubt attributed his conquests to his *fatal charm*." Sam smiled bleakly and went on. "We got the confession because when he ran into a woman who resisted him, he got rattled — he had to have her to save his ego and he went too far — thus he became Hally's pawn instead of the reverse."

"But the other six murders!"

Sam went on grimly. "There's only one explanation. Michener's power was so potent it could be broadcast — it went out over the air and found six minds with exactly the right susceptibility. At the time of those murders, Michener sat staring into the TV camera with his whole mental force dwelling upon his hatred for his wife — planning her murder — forming the picture of crashing a weight down on her skull."

Sam leaned forward. "*As a result, six hypnotized men smashed their wife's skulls because, in a sense, they were ordered to.*"

Henderson's jaw dropped; he gaped. "It's — it's absurd! Ridiculous!"

"You're damned right it is. But

it's also the truth. Believe me — it is."

"But those poor devils. They can't suffer for —"

"But they're going to. There's nothing we can do about it. Do you think for one minute the *truth* in this case would stand up in court? Any lawyer using the true facts for a defense would be sent to a psychiatrist."

They talked further and the certainty of this became absolute. Finally Sam got to his feet. He was very tired. "Too bad we can't write a happy ending to this one, Bart — justice done and all that — but there isn't any happy end-

ing. We can only take satisfaction from one thing — we stopped it. We cut out the rotten core."

Henderson looked up quickly. "But what if there are others — if there will be others. It's something entirely new — maybe an evolutionary development that will begin to manifest in others and —"

"We can only hope Michener was a freak that won't be repeated," Sam said. "I'm going to drop in on Hally. So long."

"So long, Sam." Henderson stared at the wall. His eyes were vague. There was a fear in them.

THE END

★ *The Coming Satellite* ★

THESE days, when you mention "the satellite . . ." there is no question about what you're talking about. It means of course the miniature moon intended to be hurled into space, stimulated by the efforts of the world's scientific community through celebration of the "Geophysical Year."

Speculation is rife about the form of the device, most of it quite reasonable, for by now, the principles of satellites, rockets and orbits have reached the level of elementary engineering information.

Unquestionably the satellite will be thrust as high as possible, and in terms of presently conceivable chemical rocket motors, this will be

around two hundred miles. It cannot be less than this height simply because air resistance would bring the vehicle to Earth too soon. The further out the satellite can be planted, the longer it will remain there as long as techniques can only hurl to the atmospheric fringe.

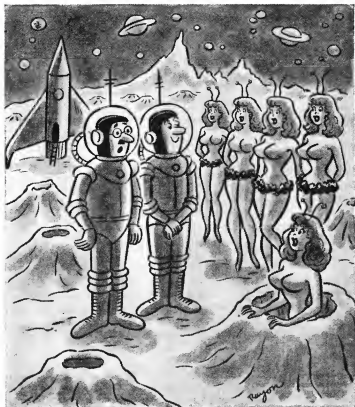
The shape of the satellite is of no importance whatever; it may be a sphere, a rocket nose or any other useful form. Its size, so long as it is larger than a few cubic feet, will enable it to be tracked optically when its orbit and path have been defined.

It may or may not be dead, that is it may or may not carry radio sound equipment. If it does, fine.

If it does not, fine also, for simple tracking, optical and radar will tell scientists volumes.

Probably it will contain equipment for radioing back information, even though after the power

goes, the equipment will cease to operate. There's hope, in some quarters that by the time the satellite is ready, the "solar battery" will be developed into a useful power supply for the device.



"Dammit, Higgins, we're out of luck
—not a male specimen among them!"

Conrad was a hunted man because he defied
the power Delevan held over Earth; but one man
could not defeat tyranny, unless he became a —

Juggernaut From Space

by

S. M. Jenneshaw

THE BLACKEST DAY in all history for the enslaved population of Terra, was June 9th, 2106. That was the day they captured Conrad. That day, the hearts of five billion people acknowledged defeat.

Of course, they had not been free for fifty years; not since Delevan the Great had accomplished his monstrous betrayal. Arch-conspirator of all time, Delevan (he demanded upon threat of quick death to be called Great by all Terrans) championed Project Satellite, proclaiming it as a great boon to the world. A shining globe ten thousand feet in diameter, circling the earth fifty miles out - - - what scientific and climatic advantages could not be achieved from such a base?

So they trusted him and loved him and allowed him to build the satellite for their own greater good. But he built it for his own mon-

strous egomania and after equipping it with all manner of lethal instruments, said in effect to all Terrans: "There is now a gun at your head. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the gun will be a reminder that I am master of this world. Disobedience to my whim will merit instant death - - - let that be understood. And now my men will come down and pass among you - - - will relieve you of your valuables and enslave you according to my plans."

There was resistance of course - - - brave, proud men who preferred death to slavery. So they died - - - and in such fiery and spectacular ways that the rest of the world turned pale and submitted to the chains of Delevan the Great.

And an era of dictatorship began such as the world had never before seen. Delevan the Great, an



obvious madman, ruled the world as a child rules its realm of toys and playthings. A cruel and sadistic child.

Mankind could see no way out because no one could reach Delevan the Great. He was beyond justice - - - beyond vengeance out there on his terrible satellite. And the world was without hope. All Mankind could see was slavery for themselves and their children and their children's children. This because Delevan's regime would be perpetrated from one generation to the next. Delevan, an evil man, had surrounded himself with other evil

ones and there would always be a new one to accept the mantle of cruelty.

Only my grandfather, it seemed to me, looked at the sad and bleeding world through eyes of hope. Time and again, in the midst of our sufferings, he would raise his face to the hateful satellite riding the free, blue skies and say, "A hero will come - - - a leader - - - a giant-killer who will free us from our bonds."

Others laughed bitterly at my grandfather and said, "This hero, old one, will he have seven heads and a body of indestructible steel

and be able to fly through the air on nothing?"

They said these things because they knew only such a man as this could free them; because here was a situation beyond the control of any man equipped with the body and mind of an ordinary mortal.

My grandfather would shrug and say, "No, my miserable friends." So saying, he would look up into the sky with a strange and wonderful expression upon his face and go on. "This hero will be even as you and I. An ordinary man with all the weaknesses of ordinary men. But he will have also, a great strength - - - a God-given determination to right a great wrong."

My grandfather's fervor would bend them for a moment. Through a great and helpless yearning, they would accept his mighty conviction and they would murmur, "Truly, if he comes he will be an inspired figure, glowing with the inner grace of God."

But Grandfather would shake his head. "No, not necessarily. You have not studied history. Often the stuff of heroes does not glow - - - often it is shoddy, smelly, in its elemental form. It could even be disgusting to lesser men."

Then the spell of my grandfather's vision would be broken

and they would say, "You are a fool, old man," and go their hopeless ways.

GRANDFATHER was a cut above the rest. He was an educated man in a time when education was forbidden. And he insisted on passing his knowledge on to me. In a secret cellar beneath our house he showed me his precious books and I learned of other times when the world was a free and happy place. I learned of the great heroes - - - of Lincoln and Washington and Juarez and Garibaldi and Moses - - - great spirits that rise up at pivotal points of human progress to right vast wrongs.

I dreamed of them and visualized them as shining gods of awe-inspiring stature before which all other men stood mute. Then I would realize that no one man, however gifted, inspired, or determined, could save our world. We were lost forever - - - hammered upon by a beast no man could reach.

Thus did we live, dreaming futile dreams, and one night there was a knock upon our door.

Grandfather opened it. I peered around him and saw a dirty, ragged creature arise from the shadows to croak, "Let me in. I'm starving. Let me in, I say."

He looked on the brink of death but his tone was arrogant and his manner almost jaunty as he made his demand. I expected my grandfather to send him on his way but instead the door was opened and Grandfather said, "Come in quickly. Were you followed?"

The man staggered in and Grandfather closed the door after him. He dropped to the floor and lay as one who could go no further.

I was alarmed and frightened. "Why did you let him in. He's in trouble. He'll bring trouble to us."

The man rolled over and grinned up at us. "The kid's a lot smarter than you are, old man. Hiding criminals is a good way to get your area blown off the face of the earth."

When Grandfather spoke it was to me rather than to the miserable bag of bones on the floor. He said, "My son - - - always remember this. Aiding an unfortunate brother is the last privilege left us as human beings. If we die for it, we have achieved a good and dignified death."

The man on the floor laughed. "You spout philosophy while the world twists in agony, old one. It was such as you who allowed this to happen."

"Perhaps you are right," Grand-

father said.

"Have you got any food?"

"Of course."

The man got up and slumped into a chair while Grandfather prepared a supper of sorts. When it was half-ready, the man reached over and snatched the meager leg of mutton from the platter and went at it like a wolf.

He disgusted me and I couldn't hold my tongue. I said, "Most people wash themselves before they eat."

Grandfather turned on me. "Hold your tongue, lad. This man is starving."

The man swallowed a great hunk of the meat and grinned. "Let him talk, old one. He has spirit. There is too little of that around these days."

"You've made no comment on the kindness in this house!" I snapped. "I would have sent you on your way."

"That shows you're intelligent. Intelligence could have saved this world."

"What do you care for this world and its people?" I taunted.

He appeared to sober as he lowered the mutton shank with grease dripping from his unshaven jowls. "As much as you, or the old one, or the man next door," he said, "but with a slight difference."

"And what is that difference?"

"I will die for my caring. The rest of you will cringe and live."

He threw down the bone and got up from the chair, seemingly revitalized by the short rest and the spate of meat. "I want to clean up. Have you got a place?"

Grandfather motioned toward the bathroom and this filthy, hunted animal grinned and walked jauntily out of the room . . .

"MY NAME is Conrad," he said. "If I live another week it will be a miracle." With the dirt and the whiskers off, I could see the man. He was slight of stature, weighing not more than one hundred and ten. His face was wedgelike with a great jut of a nose giving him a profile like a hawk. His mouth was an arrogant slash and I somehow got the impression of an upstart hawk screaming defiance at the world. An ugly, unpleasant man. I hated him.

"Why are they after you?" Grandfather asked.

Conrad laughed viciously as though enjoying a cruel joke. "I found a few dabs of spirit around and about. Spirit in men - - - a rare thing these days. I organized them into a group. We called it the Minute Men - - -"

"You too have read history,"

Grandfather said.

"Until it nauseated me. History is a vast obscenity of Man's stupidity allowing cruelty and injustice over and over again."

Grandfather smiled. "And you accused me of philosophizing."

"Anyhow," Conrad went on cheerfully, "I made a mistake and initiated a spy into the group." He grinned, now, in relish. "Fortunately, I discovered my error before he had been introduced to the body. I was the only one he knew. I killed him but not in time to keep their jackals off my heels."

"Then get out!" I said. "You've got no right to endanger us."

Grandfather said nothing. His eyes were upon me and they held an odd, undefinable look. Conrad got up from his chair and stretched. Grandfather spoke quietly. "You are welcome to stay as long as you like."

Conrad laughed. "We're a pair of fools, you and I, old one. Let's not contaminate youth."

"You're leaving?"

He shivered. "You have no heat in here."

"I'm sorry. Our unit went bad. There is no one to repair it."

This seemed to delight him. "A Zennon unit?"

"Yes."

The Zennon unit was purportedly self-sustaining, although ours had

not sustained itself after the first three years. Grandfather indicated the unit and Conrad approached it hungrily. With a sure hand he broke down the unit and studied its delicate parts. "You've let the buffering material leak out from around the catalyst chamber," he said.

"Perhaps that was when the stove was dropped - - -" Grandfather began.

That infuriated him. "People who handle a miracle like this roughly should be exiled to the poles," he said. "Do you realize that within that catalyst chamber lies power undreamed of? Power to fuse and form and blend and release? Do you realize that starting with that single chamber a man can dream worlds upon worlds?" His scowl was vicious. "And possibly produce them?"

We were silent. He turned to his work and a few minutes later straightened and gave the stove a last lingering look. "It will work now. If you don't bang it around it will work forever."

"You seem to know a lot about the Zennon theory." Grandfather said.

"I evolved it."

Grandfather's eyes widened. "You're *that* Conrad?"

He actually sneered and my hatred for him deepened. "Is there

any other?"

He and Grandfather reached the door at the same time. Grandfather said "You mustn't leave. Where will you go? What will you do?"

"Collect my shrinking violets. Recharge the courage of my group. Enlist new members." He turned his hawk-eyes on me. "Perhaps you'd like to join, youngster?"

I gave him back his sneer with interest. "Are you afraid to die alone?"

He laughed and was gone and there was silence in the room for some time. I knew Grandfather's eyes were upon me and finally I turned to face him. "All right! I was ill-mannered. But he affected me that way. I couldn't help it. Strutting in here as though he had - - -"

"The right? Perhaps he did."

"I don't understand you."

Grandfather sighed. "You talk and dream of shining heroes. Yet you are as blind as the rest."

This was incredible. "Do you mean that filthy, insulting - - -"

"I mean that a hero - - - a great spirit - - - is not a man. He is courage and wisdom and knowledge made visible in a human form."

"You're actually trying to tell me this Conrad is - - - oh, Grandfather! Be serious."

"I'm only saying that courage

should be respected in whatever form it appears. Do you deny the man was courageous?"

"I only say he was a fool."

"He is one of the greatest scientists who ever lived. That alone should command your respect. He could be living in ease because they wanted his mind and what it would do for them. But he refused to deal with them so he is now a fugitive hiding like an animal in the darkness."

"A dirty and repulsive egotist."

"I'm afraid I haven't been able to teach you much," my grandfather said.

I was standing close to the stove, absorbing its heat. I made no reply.

I TOOK IT for granted that Conrad would be dead twenty-four hours after he left our house and I was glad he *had* left it. But by some miracle, he lived. And by some greater miracle, his living and his presence upon an enslaved globe engendered a spark.

It was ignited slowly. Whispered words passed from lip to lip. At first no one would listen and the words passed furtively. Then, among the people we knew, the words were spoken more boldly. Shoulders straightened and eyes were a little brighter when the people learned they could speak

among themselves of this absurd champion and not be blasted off the earth as punishment.

I say absurd because that was how I felt. And I pitied the people. After all, I had seen Conrad. I knew him for what he was, while they had to build their image from imagination and hearsay.

They do not bomb because he moves so swiftly and stealthily.

He is organizing a great underground army. Are you a member? You a member? You wouldn't say of course. Secrecy is the keynote of his plans. Soon we shall rise and smash their chains.

Such silly talk. Not that I objected to hoping and dreaming for a champion, but tying a dream to that wispy little madman seemed to me the height of folly.

So I kept silent and as the spirit of hope and rebellion greatened, I waited for disciplinary blastings to occur around the earth. No blastings came, however, and this I considered proof that Delevan the Great did not consider Conrad any menace whatever.

Men from Delevan's occupation forces came in squads to drag the leaders of each settlement out into the open and question them. They of course denied all knowledge of Conrad but I noticed they protested differently than in former questionings. Not so abjectly - - -

with more sullenness and almost with a touch of spirit.

After a squad left one day I asked Grandfather, "Why don't they drop disciplinary bombs. They always did before."

"I think they sense the difference in this case," Grandfather said.

"How is this different?"

"They realize that Conrad has fired the people. Therefore they do not want to kill him."

"Why not?"

"They must take him alive and show him to the people as the symbol of their defeat. They must see their champion in chains, helpless and humiliated."

"Do you think they will capture him?"

"No."

TIME WENT BY and as the days passed, I was proved wrong. The spirit of Conrad was a vitalizing force that stiffened the peoples of the world - - - the slaves of the world. Word of him crept from settlement to settlement, from town to town, from city to city; stories of Conrad's spirit, his cleverness at avoiding capture; his uncanny ability to outthink the mobile squads of Delevan.

Delevan's men were always represented as bumbling idiots and Conrad invariably toyed with them

as a cat with mice. The stories were passed in whispers from place to place and the world was filled with the silent laughter of contempt.

I knew of course that few if any of these stories were true, having seen the man himself and being thus entirely aware of his inadequacies. Thus I resented his coming and told Grandfather as much.

Grandfather did not agree with me. "Suppose the stories of Conrad are nothing more than the people's wishful thinking. Do they not make life more bearable for them? It seems to me anything that makes them defy the tyrant, even silently in spirit, is well worthwhile."

I could not agree with him. I thought the Conrad optimism was a cruel thing - - - building men's hopes - - - hopes that would inevitably be dashed to the ground. So I said nothing, knowing that Grandfather's feelings on the subject were very strong.

Days and weeks passed. The silent fervor increased and word passed that a vast underground army had been recruited by Conrad. Such stories puzzled me. I could not understand what they hoped to accomplish. I thought of every soul on earth enlisted into this army. Would they be any better off? Could they combine

forces and stare Delevan's satellite out of the sky?

I wondered, too, what Delevan was doing about all this. Certainly he was aware of the trend. It seemed to me he should have been disturbed.

He was. And he had done something about it.

On the morning of June 9th, 2106 an announcement came over the public speakers: The voice was harsh and mocking: "Citizens of Terra. You will be gratified to know that the traitor Conrad has been apprehended. The security agents of Delevan the Great, always alert to the welfare of the people of Terra, have this upstart in chains. No longer will he spread vicious unrest among Delevan's beloved subjects. In order that the people of Terra may see this criminal and personally voice their contempt, Conrad will be exhibited in every community and city where such exhibition is possible. Also, transportation will be provided to centers of population so that all may see this despicable creature - - -"

Grandfather could listen to no more. He went into the house and closed the door. I listened a while longer and then followed him. Even though things had worked out as I had expected, a feeling of bleak misery came upon me and I

realized I too, had been hoping and praying for the magnificent upstart.

THEY DID as they promised. Conrad, a sorry figure in his chains, was taken from place to place and silent crowds stared at him. He was brought through our settlement. Grandfather and I refused to look, but others did and stood in silence as they tasted the ashes of their absurd dream.

I don't know whether Delevan expected more or not. I think he had hoped for demonstrations of hatred. But he did not get them, and possibly that was what motivated his next move. Anyhow, the announcement came:

"The traitor Conrad's sentence has been passed upon him. It has been decreed that an asteroid shall be drawn in from outer space. It shall be set in an orbit circling Terra and Conrad shall be exiled upon this rock. There he shall live in isolation, contemplating for the rest of his days, the scene of his infamy."

Delevan was saying in effect:

Look upon Conrad, Terrans, as a living, ever-present example of what defiance of Delevan means. Look on Conrad and crawl back into your miserable holes.

The Terrans did just that. They looked at the bleak satellite curv-

ing around Terra. They crawled back into their tunnels of despair and their hopes and dreams became memories.

Grandfather and I spoke little of Conrad. I remember only one thing he said. One day he turned to me abruptly: "You were right."

"Right? About what?"

"About Conrad - - - and the hope I had. It is wrong to dream when one knows in his heart that there is really nothing to dream on."

Suddenly I knew I did not agree. I too had learned something. But I could not put it into words so I said nothing.

Delevan the Great never allowed the people to forget Conrad. He wanted Conrad to become a symbol of their hopelessness and his own power. The people were told of his routine. He had been given grays and a space suit and was allowed to order materials and tools he could use to make the planet habitable; a blaster to cut himself a cave in the solid rock of the asteroid. It was about three miles in diameter and a more horrible exile could not have been imagined; forever alone on a cold rock within sight of the sweet green planet he could never set foot upon again. That was the fate of the poor unfortunate Conrad.

Time passed and Delevan's commentators relayed bits of infor-

mation concerning Conrad, keeping him alive in the minds of the people. He was allowed to see no human being. He left his supply orders on one side of the asteroid and was forbidden to be in sight when the supply ship landed or embarked.

Before too long, the pattern became apparent; what Delevan had had in mind. A ghastly irony. Conrad had wanted the earth. So Delevan gave him a world of his own to play with. A gesture of supreme contempt on the part of the tyrant; a gesture that revealed his ego-madness.

More time passed. Delevan reigned supreme. One day, thinking of the past, I realized it had been ten years since the night Conrad had appeared at our door. I looked at Grandfather. He had aged thirty years in that ten and was now very feeble. I too, had aged. I was a young man who showed the marks of tyranny on my body and my mind.

And too, there is something indicative in the fact that on that day, my spirits had never been lower. My spirits at their lowest ebb.

On the day of deliverance.

IT BEGAN spectacularly. Early dawn. Grandfather and I were seated in the yard. There was a

breeze there and the summer night had been hot. Suddenly, over the public speaker blared a voice that sent an overpowering thrill through my body.

The voice of Conrad.

There was no doubt of it! The same rasping arrogance I remembered so well. The same sneering contempt; the same verbal reflection of an unquenchable spirit.

Conrad!

"People of Terra. Watch the skies! The tyrant has furnished the weapons for his own destruction! Watch the skies!"

There was hard, rasping laughter; the laughter I remembered so well. Then the speakers went dead.

"It's - - - impossible!" I gasped.

"One would think so," Grandfather said "Yet - - -"

"It's a trick of some kind. Delevan is trying to - - -"

"No!" Grandfather's eyes were glowing as they searched the sky.

"It was Conrad! Remember - - - he is a scientist. He found a way to tap into their speaker system from his prison. Otherwise, why did they cut it off so suddenly?"

We were silent, watching the sky. And we saw a wonderful thing. In the bright light of dawn, Conrad's asteroid, swinging its eternal orbit, came suddenly alive as two crimson tails, then a third, spouted out into space.

"Jet's - - -" I babbled. "Jets! He's built three jets into the asteroid."

Grandfather's ancient hand was gripping my wrist with surprising strength. Then we spoke no more. We sat spellbound, watching.

As Conrad's asteroid veered from its orbit like vengeance incarnate and rocketed straight toward Delevan's satellite. The magnificence of this sight can not be put into words. It was more than a mere asteroid blazing toward an iron satellite. It was the flaming symbol of one man's defiance being hurled through the skies at every tyrant who had ever lived.

Watching there on Terra we could visualize the consternation aboard Delevan's satellite. Men rushing feverishly around trying to man guns, trying to swing away from the arc of the plunging asteroid.

But security and indolence had taken their toll. Panic was in command on the satellite. Panic, and like a lean and hungry wolf, like a screaming eagle of vengeance, Conrad's asteroid flashed down through the sky - - - straight and true.

There was a blinding explosion . . .

THE REST is of course history. The swift, hysterical upris-

ing among the people of Terra.
The new order.

Freedom.

And some time later, Grandfather and I stood - - - two free men before the great shrine that had been erected to the sacred

memory of Conrad. We looked at the great, glowing golden symbol and spoke softly.

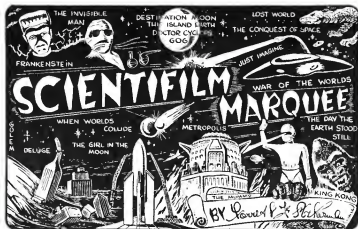
"I am going to write his history," I said.

Someday I will.

THE END



"Sometimes I wonder what I ever saw in you . . ."



CINERAMA IN SPACE! Wouldn't that be cinemarvelous? A Clarke's tour of the planets for the Ley man and layman alike. I like! The first time I saw the first Cinerama I said to the sci-fi fans with me, "This is the movie medium that was born to take us to Mars. Bonestell, oil up your easel!" And now rumor reaches my delighted ears that Louis de Rochemont is contemplating just such a project, with Orson Welles as narrator!

I have never forgotten a story I read in 1928. Hugo Gernsback predicted well when, in the introduction to it, he said: "It's one of those stories that come along once in a generation. A story that will live forever." Certainly 30-year fen from Madle to Miller to Moskowitz will remember it, and it is about to be given a rebirth on the silver screen. Few flashes in *SCIENTIFILM*

MARQUEE could give me greater satisfaction than to report that I personally drew up a contract for and agented the sale of the Homer Eon Flint classic, *THE NTH MAN*. American International Films will produce this Kong-size feature of the man two miles tall—!

In the stampede to develop and exploit new and different monsters and mutants, science fiction films are being threatened with a metamorphosis into zoance fiction. In the mad menagerie of freaks forthcoming we have mole men, a mermaid, a giant mantis, a super cephalopoid, crustacean killers, an ant man, "she-creature" (kind of harpie with pincers)—even a tree man. Eventually there'll be nothing left to shoot but "The Circus of Dr. Lao".

Due to its smash hit twice-a-night for a week trial revival on television, the 22 year old *KING*

KONG will have another major nationwide theatrical resurrection.

One morning soon you will turn to the ad section of your daily newspaper and be confronted with a choice of seeing *Cyclops*, *Flame Maidens from Outer Space*, 1984, *The Gamma People*, *Earth vs the Flying Saucers*, *The Last Day on Earth* and *Creeping Unknown*. The latter is the real sleeper of the lot; I've previously described its outstanding qualities to you under the titles "The Quartermass Experiment" and "Shock! !"

The title of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Dick Matheson's Gold Medal-Universal International book-film) has shrunk to *The Incredible Shrunk Man*.

Toward the Unknown and *X, the Unknown* are two entirely different pictures.

Ivan Tors, thru the Science Fiction Agency, has taken an option on Stanley Weinbaum's "The Adaptive Ultimate". This has been done on radio and three versions on television, including an hour long production starring Phyllis Thaxter and Tors' own Science Fiction Theatre. But now the great suspense story of the invulnerable beauty who bids to become invincible mistress of the world is to be given the full film treatment.

Paging Susan Hayward: Tiger-gal, I'd give one of the cornerstones of my collection to see you portray the protagonist of Weinbaum's great book, "The Black Flame". You'd be superb as Margaret of Urbs, the future's fabulous woman: Imperious, evil, immortal . . . and fatally beautiful.

Marguerite of the Night is a new, 100 minute long, technicolored ver-

sion from France of the Faust legend . . . GODZILLA, the Japanese King Kong, is about to terrorize the country in an all-out schlua (shock value) campaign set to top *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *War of the Worlds*, et al. And there's a RETURN OF GODZILLA already in the can . . . Character actor Edmund Gwenn, who dates way back to the Karloff film *The Walking Dead* and was the entymologist in THEM!, will next essay the role of *The Green Man*.

Richard Denning, who starred in the original, has been signed for an untitled sequel to *The Day the World Ended* . . . Curtis Harrington, who produced and acted in his own fantasy film at the age of 14 and has since steadily built a reputation in the surrealist field, has scripted *The Girl from Beneath the Sea* which Roger Corman will direct for Allied Artists . . . Ken Darling has scripted *Envoy Earth* . . . Jane Mann has done the screenplay for *They Lived a Million Years*, to be shot in Alaska by Boris Petroff . . . Lon Chaney, Jr. will appear as *The Lizard Man* for the producers of *The Black Sleep*; he costars in the latter with Bela Lugosi, Basil Rathbone, John Carradine, Akim Tamiroff and Tors Johnson. A word to Warner Bros: How about a remake of Merritt's *Seven Footprints to Satan*, recently published in pocketbook form for the fourth time? Tors Johnson would be ideally cast in the role of Satan.

KAREL ZEMAN is preparing a fulllength feature, *Into the Universe by Rocket* and an adaptation of the Jules Verne novel "The Destructive Invention". Two of his

previous productions, *The Black Diamond* and *A Journey into the Prehistoric Times*, have combined live action with trick photography, picturing amphiobia of the Carboniferous era, including the Edaphosaurus, Stegoccephal and Dolichosom.

Bound for Broadway are two recent s.f. novels, "Good as Gold" by Alfred Toombs as a straight play and John Schneider's satire of 1960, "The Golden Kazoo", as a musical.

The Living Idol, s.f., has been produced in Mexico by Al Lewin. Recent South of the Border scientific films include *El Monstruo Resucitado* (Revived Monster), *El Hombre y la Bestia* (Man & Beast) and *La Bruja* (The Witch).

Milner Bros, producers of *The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues*, plan a trio: *The Headless Man*, *The Last Man to Die* and *The Creature with 1000 lives* . . . Curt Siodmak has scripted *The Man Who Could Not Die* for Universal from an original by Charles Beaumont . . . Anna Hunger and R. DeWitt Miller have turned their Ace Novel, "The Man Who Lived Forever", into a screenplay . . . Geo. Fox Productions is interested in the Rocklynne-Ackerman treatment of "Time Wants A Skeleton" . . . Geo. Pal's new Galaxy Productions has purchased a novel about prehistoric Mexico called "Yesterday."

Wilson Tucker's *Man from Tomorrow* (nee "Wild Talent") will be produced by Sol Lesser. There's also Hollywood interest in Tucker's "Long Loud Silence" . . . "Not This August" by Cyril Kornbluth has got a film bid . . . Charles Nuetzel is preparing a screen treatment of L. Ron Hubbard's fascinating novel,

"Death's Deputy." Hubbard's serial "The Tramp," about the little man with mitogenic eyes, is under consideration for filming. As are Ed Earl Repp's "Radium Pool" and "Out of the Earth" and Edmond Hamilton's "Pigmy Island" and "The Space Visitors."

John Agar will star in Wm. Alland's *The Mole People* . . . Ed O'Callaghan has done *In the Depths of Space* for Sabre Productions, and Ivan Tors has registered a title, *The Space Around Us* . . . The seasons will turn backward in *Winter, Autumn, Summer, Spring*, and watch for a cold spell *The Day the Sun Grew Cold* . . . Hottening things up again will be *Flame in the Sky*.

Monolith is the mysterious title of a scientific film scheduled at Universal, which studio will also offer *The Land Unknown* . . . Tobor returns in a telefilmed series called *Here Comes Tobor*, first episode to be titled "Tobor and the Artificial Man" . . . Future offerings from England will include *The Weapon*, *This Island* and *The Volunteer* . . . Ten Jules Verne titles have been registered by one British studio!

BIG ones on the docket include ATLANTIS, David Duncan original; DARK DOMINION, Collier's-Ballantine, again by Duncan; H. G. Wells' immortal TIME MACHINE (Geo. Pal); THE 9 BILLION NAMES OF GOD, Arthur C. Clarke; Alfred Bester's prize-winning DEMOLISHED MAN (Jose Ferfer); and Wm. Sloane's oft-reprinted (and deservedly so) TO WALK THE NIGHT.

Phone Calls: Thanks, Rick Strauss, for the exclusive about *Vampire Planet* . . . Interesting,

Jerry Warren, that you'll be tying in publicity with Life, Look, True, Argosy, etc., on your "Abominable Snowman" feature . . . Good, Dick Sheffield, to hear our mutual friend Bela Lugosi will be getting back before the public in a legitimate stage production of the role that made him world-famous, *Dracula* . . . Glad, Vampira, to know you will be featured with Liberace in the Bridey Murphy farce, "Come As You Were" . . . I might have known, lb Melchior, that some studio would be snapping up the best-selling Morey Bernstein hypno-

reincarnation, *Search for Bridey Murphy* book . . . so Paramount took it? . . . Thanks, Pandora Bronson, for the tip on *The 'She Creature* . . . Merci beaucoup, Jim Nicholson, for the word on *The Invisible Monster* . . . and danke schon, Lou Place, for the advance info on *Keepers of the Earth*.

- - Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature. Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by those having news items to contribute.

THE END



If there's one thing an artist needs for his work it's inspiration. Take a pretty girl for example—from another world. A girl like—

Christopher Hart's Borkle

by

Henry Still

THIS TIME the fight was really out of hand. Shirley stalked savagely to and fro, her bare feet ignoring the splintery floor, the smock flapping around her naked shanks. Chris sat on the cot in the corner and watched her dumbly.





There wasn't much more to be said, but Shirley was saying it. Fortunately, he was detached enough now that he could admire the muscular movement of her long flashing legs.

He squinted at the half-finished nude on his canvas. Not bad. He had been doing all right with the legs and Shirley's other points. She had talent - - as a model and otherwise.

On her next pass, she aimed a bare-footed kick and sent the canvas and easel crashing against the wall.

"You think you can dump me, just like that!" She snapped her fingers like the sound of a small bone breaking. "Well it won't be easy, sonny boy."

Chris tried to stand up. He was tall enough to look down at her from up there. But he didn't make it. She shoved and he sat down again.

"Two years!" she snarled. "Two years I've been posing for you, nursing your two-bit talent along, boosting your ego, selling your stuff uptown - -"

"And you've shared my bed and board," Chris said wearily.

Shirley clicked her teeth shut like a hungry hawk.

"I've paid for every penny of it," she muttered, "I made the contacts. Without me you'd starve

to death. Where would you be without the contacts I made uptown?"

This time he stood up and grabbed the lapels of her smock in his big fists.

"I know how you made some of those contacts. And maybe I'll starve without them. But get this straight. I'm not trying to bump you. All I want to do is paint. Just once. Paint a decent picture to see if there's any heart left. I'm so damned sick of this commercial junk I could puke. You're all alike. If you can't carve 50 bucks ready money out of a guy's brains every week, you go sour."

Then Shirley squeezed out a few tears.

"You think more of that old picture than you do of me!"

Chris thought a moment. "You're right," he said, "I do."

Shirley headed sobbing for the door, but remembered to come back and put on some clothes. That process killed the melodrama, but it didn't dull her blade.

"A lot of people know about you and me and the last two years," she cried. "When you're done paying, you'll be sorry and hungry as hell."

The door slammed behind her. And Chris rolled exhausted into bed.

HE HADN'T been asleep two hours when sunshine through the skylight pried his eyes open. His ears were still raw from Shirley's bitter words.

"Nuts," he thought philosophically and rolled over under the blankets to look at the half-finished painting on the floor. Then his eyes shifted upward.

There, hanging in midair, was a woman's breast.

Perfectly formed, it was, but nothing attached. No mirrors. No wires. The model mammary gland remained motionless about five feet above the floor. Chris rubbed his eyes with a knuckle.

"Freudian symbol," he muttered. "I'm going crazy." He opened his eyes again.

Where before there had been one, now there were two, obviously a matched pair.

Chris leaped out of bed, hopeful that motion would dispel the hallucination. It didn't. They were still there, rosy in the diffused sunlight.

He tiptoed across the splintery floor, so fascinated that he stubbed his toe against a broken leg of the easel. He reached out to touch. When hallucination becomes tactile, Chris remembered from a psychology book, you're ready for the padded cell.

He was ready. The flesh was

warm.

Absently he picked up the white smock Shirley had used and draped it over the apparition.

"Hey, take it easy," a voice said. "I can't see."

Chris snatched away the cloth.

In the sunlight the swirling dust motes began to form a new shape. A face - - a beautiful face - - was forming in the dry morning mist of the room. Like sparkling, brushed cobweb, a halo of silver-golden hair fell into place like good brush strokes on canvas.

"Good morning," she said sweetly. "It is morning, isn't it? That's what I'm set for."

"Yes," Chris whispered, his throat dry from breathing through his mouth. "It's morning." He reached for his bathrobe and draped it self-consciously over his angular frame.

When he looked again, *she* had a neck, and shoulders. Stubs of arms gradually were extending themselves to where elbows should be.

"You're a witch!" he blurted out of his almost forgotten storehouse of adolescent dreams and wishes. Her laughter emptied into the drab room, brightening its corners with the sound of silver bells.

"Oh, no. It's just that darn class in basic mentaportation. I

hate that old prof. He insists we must do a full smorge or we don't get any credit - -" She bit her lip. " - -that would be awful. I'm the family dummy anyway."

The arms were complete now. She flexed her fingers with satisfaction.

"I'm coming along very well, don't you think?"

Chris nodded vigorously.

"You can hand me that smock now, if you please."

He complied, watching her slip it on. The effect was even more startling. The smock reached to where her knees should be, but they weren't.

A BREEZE from the open window moved the cloth gently, swinging it under her uncompleted torso.

"I'm Myrrha," she smiled. Chris pulled his slack jaw back in place. "I'm not magic. You're just 200 years behind us and menta-transportation, after all, is the only sort of time travel they've ever discovered."

"Time travel?" Chris gurgled, "200 years?"

"Oh yes," Myrrha said brightly. "But it isn't easy and it's a required course for seniors." She turned her back, lifted the smock and dropped it again. "It'll take a little while yet. The smart kids

make a complete smorge in two minutes, but not little Myrrha. I'll be glad when it's over."

"I won't," Chris said impulsively. "You're very lovely - -"

"What did you say?"

"I said you're lovely."

She leaned forward - - at least the part he could see - - and kissed him on the nose. Tears glistened unaccountably in her eyes.

"You're the first man that ever said that to me."

"You're kidding!"

"No." She shook her head and wiped the tears. "Back home they - - I'm a borkle. No, that's slang. Well, if you must know, I'm just plain ugly! I never go to parties and the boys - -"

"They're nuts," Chris exploded. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

"Gee, I'm glad I smorged here," she breathed. "The books said it was romantic and I wanted to meet a real artist starving in a garret. This is a garret, isn't it?"

Chris nodded.

"And you're starving to death?" she asked eagerly.

"W-e-l-l," Chris scratched his chin and grinned. "Not quite yet. There's a bowl of yesterday's beans in the icebox."

"Oh." Her tone conveyed disappointment. "But I'll bet you will be before long."

"That's encouraging."

"What's your name?"

"Sorry. It's Chris. Christopher Hart."

"Hart," she mused. "That's familiar. Oh, I know. It's in the museum. A funny old nude - -"

"In the museum?" Chris grabbed her shoulders.

"Yes. She looks like me - -"

"Of course, she looks like you," he yelled. "I'm going to paint you. Right now."

He kicked over a chair in his eagerness to gather up the broken easel. He dusted off the canvas, propped it on a chair and grabbed paint and brushes.

"You will pose, won't you?"

"I think I'd like to," Myrrha said, "but I'm not all here yet."

"That's all right," he assured her briskly. "I do my heads first anyway. Just take your time. We'll work down at your leisure. How soon do you have to go back?"

"In an hour, when class is up. If we don't finish, they just drag us back and that's embarrassing."

"Not enough time," he said. "Could you do it again sometime, come back here I mean?"

She shook her head. "They don't allow it. I could get a license, but that requires three years and a Ph.D."

"Well, never mind. Let's get the head now anyway."

He went to work. Myrrha turned again to examine her progress.

"Don't move," he said sharply. "I want to get this right."

"I'm sorry," she whispered and resumed her pose.

Chris painted furiously. It was good. Several minutes passed, a quarter hour. He heard something that sounded like a sob.

"What's the matter?" He turned impatiently. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. "Oh, I'm sorry. You're tired. Take a break."

"It's not that," she sobbed. "I'm just not coming through. I don't think I'm going to get past the knees."

"That's too bad," Chris said. Obviously it was an inadequate summation. Myrrha burst into a new, violent storm of tears.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"I'm afraid not." She smiled through her tears. "It doesn't really matter, I suppose. It'll mean a D on this test, but I might be able to talk the prof into letting me take it over."

"You mean you might come back?"

"I could try," Myrrha said. "I don't know if I could. Hitting just right is like shooting a fly in a bee hive. But I'll try - - tomorrow - - if he'll let me. I do want to come back and pose," she whispered, caressing his cheek lightly

with her fingertips. "It's been awfully nice."

"Maybe I can help," Chris offered eagerly. "You come back tomorrow. I'll help you get through."

Myrrha smiled and vanished. Dust swirled into the vacuum where she had been. The room was really empty now. In a fit of frustration he threw a brush across the room. It clattered against the wall and fell to the floor.

He examined the painting. He had daubed wild over the old work. A lovely head. But the emptiness of the rest of it mocked him now.

Lost, two models in one day. For the first time in several hours he remembered Shirley. But she was gone. And he needed this other beauty to pull the thread of genius out of his mediocre talent.

At noon he ate the beans.

IN THE MORNING he leaped out of bed before the sun climbed to the skylight and checked the battered alarm clock. Still early for Myrrha's class in mentaportation. At least he presumed her brave new world still operated on the same 24-hour day as his own.

Time had never bothered Chris before, but now every moment of waiting seemed to bleed away a year's worth of nervous energy. Ten o'clock passed. Another half

hour.

Probably the professor wouldn't let her try it, or it failed again. Perhaps she had started materializing and it fizzled before even a part of her became visible. She might have missed him by 50 years. Or a miscalculation of 12 hours would plunk her down in the middle of China.

Or she might have missed him only by two or three blocks - - in this very city - - and have no idea where to find him. He wasn't listed in the phone book.

At 11 o'clock there came a soft knock on the door.

The sound filled him with elation. Myrrha had come after all. She had missed his room, but had landed near enough to find him.

Chris leaped to the door, threw it open, and almost fell down the stairs.

"My goodness," Shirley smiled brightly. "I didn't expect *this* sort of reception."

She wore a blue suit and a perky little hat calculated to melt the memory of their quarrel.

"Come in," Chris mumbled through his purple fog of disappointment. But she was already in. She removed her hat and shook out that thick mass of gleaming blue-black hair. He could remember the smell of it.

"I knew you'd want to apolo-

gize for the fight," Shirley said.

"I?" Chris found his voice again. "I, *apologize*?"

"Of course, darling. I'm not one to hold a grudge. I knew you couldn't get along without me." Her tone was a bit cloying.

"I'm sorry about the easel," Shirley laughed, nudging a piece of wood with her toe. "I'm quite a wildcat when I want to be, hmmm?"

She turned back, her arms reaching languidly, assuming he would be waiting for the clinch.

But he wasn't. Between them stood the painting, propped on the chair. Her arms remained suspended in the air, but the fingers curled like a witch delivering a curse.

"Who," she asked in a tone of deadly quiet, "is this?"

Chris could think of no words to make the truth sound truthful. So he lied.

"I dreamed it up after you left. I was sore, so I made the hair blonde out of spite."

Shirley had a good eye for art. Many times before she had sized up his pictures, mentally translating them into negotiable paper.

"You're not that good," she hissed, "without a model. Who is this hussy?"

"I am not a hussy," an indignant voice said behind her.

Shirley whirled. Chris nearly dropped his teeth. Myrrha, this time, was making a horizontal manifestation - - in his bed.

"There she is now!" Shirley screamed. "You've had her here all the time, hiding in your bed. You - - you flat-headed Don Juan!"

"I'm not hiding," Myrrha said angrily. "I'm just not coming through very fast yet."

Despite the shift in her position of attack, the lower half of the bed remained flat and empty. But Shirley, in her rage, hadn't noticed. Her gusty breath struck Chris in the face.

"So this is the tramp you haul in when I'm not around."

"Shut up," Chris said evenly. "That tramp is going to be my wife."

THE STATEMENT popped out without due consideration, but it sounded good, hanging in the silence. Shirley's mouth dropped open. He was surprised to notice she had a cavity in a back molar. Then her mouth snapped shut with an audible click.

"Don't be a damn fool," she snarled. "After the years of my life I've given you." She marched to the bed. "Come out of there, you!"

"I can't" Myrrha said. "I can't

move until I'm all here."

"You'll think you're not all there when I get through with you," Shirley yelled. She ripped back the blankets, and then dropped them in a slow-settling hump of cloth. Her trembling hand moved to her mouth.

"She's got no legs," she whispered, turning wildly to Chris. "What kind of horrible trick is this? She's got no legs!"

Chris found his sense of humor returning.

"I tossed them over there in the closet," he said casually.

Shirley backed away, watching Myrrha as she would a tarantula. She uttered a frantic little yip when she bumped into Chris and then detoured around him.

"I don't know what you've done," she whispered, "but I don't want any part of it."

Chris stepped between her and the door. She scuttled around him.

"Where are you going?" he asked softly.

Shirley's eyes dilated. Her mouth worked soundlessly.

"Police!" she howled at last. "I'll get the cops up here!"

She ripped open the door and ran clattering down the stairs. Chris didn't try to stop her. He snapped the lock in place and turned back to the bed.

Myrrha had pulled the blankets

up again. He could see most of her had materialized, but she was crying. He sat on the edge of the bed and patted her clumsily.

"What's the matter?" he asked gently. "Please don't cry."

"I spoiled that for you," Myrrha wailed. "She loves you and I spoiled it all."

"You did not! She doesn't love me, she loves a meal ticket."

"But it's the same here as back home. Nobody wants me there. Nobody wants me here!"

Chris hauled her up to a sitting position and wiped away her tears.

"Now you listen. I want you here. More than anything in the world. Get busy now and finish up this smorge, or whatever you call it."

"I can't," she wailed. "It's like yesterday. I'm down to my feet, but they won't come through. I can't make it."

"Good Lord," Chris groaned. "You've got to. The police station is only three blocks away. She'll be back here with the cops in 10 minutes."

"All right," Myrrha sobbed. "I don't want to cause you any trouble. I'll go on back home."

"No, don't!" Chris grabbed her arm, expecting her to vanish into dust. "I love you. I want you - - all of you. Does that help?" She kissed him softly, tears fringing

her lashes like tiny diamonds.

"I'm afraid not. I'm just stuck, that's all."

"There must be some way I can help."

She shook her head.

"You'd have to visualize that old classroom, right down to the last splinter," she said. "You've never seen anything like it. You couldn't do it."

"Wait a minute!" Chris rummaged under the bed and hauled out a sketch pad. He propped it on a chair and grabbed a pencil. "What the hell am I an artist for if I can't visualize. You tell me about that classroom. I'll draw."

Myrrha's mouth formed a startled "oh."

"Quick," he barked, "there's not much time."

MYRRHA talked. Swiftly and accurately Chris drew. Her 22nd century classroom took shape.

"That's it," she breathed, "that's good."

A siren wailed thinly in the distance.

"What about your clothes? Don't you wear any clothes back there?"

"Of course," she exclaimed. "It wouldn't work without that. The clothes never come along on a smorge. Draw a dress and things in a heap around my feet."

The siren was nearer now. Sweat

on his palms caused the pencil to slip. He erased frantically and drew again.

The siren growled down and stopped in the street outside.

"Now," Myrrha said, a note of hope in her voice, "imagine you're in that room watching me smorge."

Ordinarily, that wouldn't have been tough, but now Chris could hear the thunder of heavy feet on the first floor landing.

"Don't think about the police!" Myrrha cried. "Think about the room, about me going away. Sit there in the room and wish me to succeed. I'm all gone but the feet. Wish harder!"

Chris wished. He had never wished for anything so much in his life.

Feet were at the top of the stairs, thundering toward the door.

"Open up in there!" A nightstick rapped on the door.

But Chris didn't hear it. He was in a classroom 200 years in the future, wishing . . .

"Oh God," Myrrha whimpered, "it won't work."

"OPEN UP," a voice bellowed, "or we'll break down the door."

"Wish me up on my feet! Please, Chris. Please help me."

Chris dipped into levels of concentration he had never imagined. A heavy weight crashed into the flimsy door, bent it in, but the

lock held. Chris ignored it. His entire being was one gigantic wish.

"There!" It was a cry of triumph. Myrrha leaped out of bed and dashed naked behind a folding screen in the corner.

With a splintering crash, the door buckled and three cops sprawled on the floor. A sergeant scrambled to his feet and poked a gun in Chris' ribs.

"Where's the woman?"

"She's here somewhere," Shirley said shrilly from the doorway. "Search the room. She's got no legs."

The "no legs" routine came out cracked like a worn out phonograph record.

There weren't many hiding places in the bare room, but the officers went at it. Two looked

under the bed at once.

Then Myrrha walked out from behind the screen. She was wearing a faded sport shirt and a pair of outsized khaki pants.

"There she is!" Shirley yelled. "She's got no - -"

But Myrrha obviously did have legs.

"This the woman?" the sergeant asked. Shirley nodded dumbly.

"You've been seeing things," the officer said. "Let's go back to the station and have a talk."

The cops escorted Shirley out. Chris picked up the splintered door, pushed it partially back in place and turned to Myrrha.

"Well," he grinned, "shall we get back to the painting?"

"Not just yet," she said softly. And, of course, she kissed him.

★ *Language Machine* ★

TEN YEARS ago, prominent scientific persons expressed the belief that it would be impossible to devise a machine capable of translating one language into another.

They've been proven wrong by a number of recent developments. There is a machine in existence, which, while it has a very limited vocabulary of English and Russian words, still is capable of translating a simple mathematical document from one language to another! This is the beginning. IBM and

other huge corporations which stress the construction of business and calculating machines, are deep into the art. It is expected that thorough, heavy-brained machines soon will be ready.

There is a tremendous need for such a machine, particularly the Russian-to-English version because so many important technical Russian publications must be translated for our military services. Maybe the learning of modern language will become as obsolete as the study of Latin!



Hydrogen Fusion



THE most remarkable development to come out of the Geneva conference on Atomic Energy, is news that very well will spell the death of radioactive Uranium power piles! The curse of atomic physics is radioactive waste—what to do with it?

But a famous Indian physicist literally "blew off the lid" when he announced what the scientists of other countries could only think. He said that in twenty years hydrogen fusion would take the place of Uranium fission! And with that news other scientists, American, Russian, and British, began talking too. It seems that sooner or later controlled hydrogen fision in which

hydrogen is converted into helium with tremendous energy releases—exactly as in the Sun—is going to replace Uranium methods of generating power. The H-bomb will be tamed . . .

It is hard to realize the significance of this. Much of the developments in atomic piles for power will be wasted. But above all, with hydrogen everywhere, there will be no lack of power anywhere. Furthermore the dangerous by-products of uranium fission will not exist. All that remains is to control a hydrogen fusion system. The theoretical physicists are hot on the trail and within twenty years, it's predicted they'll more than have succeeded . .



"What do you suppose they are?"

Mayhew knew it was impossible for him to return to Earth—unless he wanted to spend his life in prison. But that was before he heard —

The Music Of The Spheres

by

Milton Lesser

MOMENTS BEFORE making planetfall on the unknown world, Mayhew saw the other spaceship.

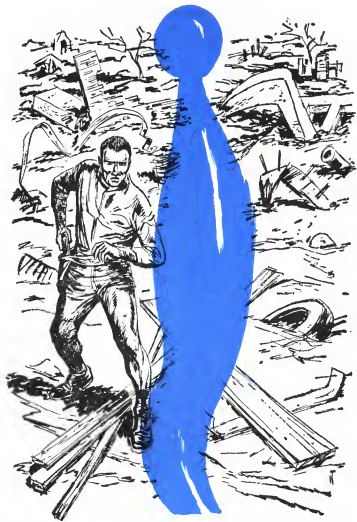
It was coming in twenty-seven degrees galactic north of Mayhew's own position. It was coming incredibly fast, but Mayhew still could have shot it out of the sky. He didn't only because the design of the ship was entirely alien to him: he knew the ships of Sol system and those of Saggitarius and those of Deneb - - but this square, tubeless, ungainly cube of a ship was of a type the Earthman had never seen before.

Entirely alien?

Naturally, it was possible. Someday, the scientists of Earth and Deneb and Saggitarius said, we will meet up in the infinity of space with an alien culture. In the first five-hundred years of spatial exploration, though, the human ex-

plorers had encountered nothing but a parade of ruined worlds. Planets where civilizations alien to us *had* flourished, but did not flourish now. Planets which had been ravished by war, which were pock-marked and glazed by H-bomb craters, as if the hallmark of intelligent life in all the ruined cities on all the ruined worlds was a dirge of death and destruction.

This meant much to the scientists and theologins, but it meant nothing to Mayhew. For Mayhew was an escaped convict who had broken out of Luna prison a thousand light years behind with a life sentence hanging over his head. The supply ship he had taken was not the fastest and sometimes he considered it almost a miracle that he had not been captured. But he had kept off the startrails, heading for the fringe of the arm of the Milky Way galaxy in which



Sol System is located. He knew a return to human civilization was barred to him forever: but he also knew he preferred freedom to captivity and the fact that he would probably never see another human face did not greatly disturb him.

Now Mayhew watched the strange cube of a spaceship hurtling toward him. He failed to realize they were heading on a collision course until it was too late. When he did realize it, when the strange ship filled all space to starboard, Mayhew cursed and heard the screaming whine of the radar warnings and punched frantically at the control board. But he was too late, for the cube-shaped ship - - it was fully ten times the size of his own, Mayhew realized - - came on inexorably. Mayhew had a split second to curse himself as a fool. He should have landed on the unknown planet which revolved about its lonely sun here in the backwaters of the galaxy, and to hell with any alien ship. But he knew from experience that if the planet below them harbored life, if it had ever harbored intelligent life, that life had probably already destroyed itself in suicidal war. It was the pattern the scientists spoke of: and Mayhew had seen it in his travels.

The cube came on, filling all space to starboard and fore and

aft. Grimly fascinated at the prospect of his own imminent death, Mayhew stared at the viewport. The cube flashed there, dazzling bright. Mayhew steeled himself for the crash and the moment of pain before death.

There was no crash.

The alien ship seemed to engulf Mayhew's small cruiser, as if - - lifelike - - it had opened a maw to its digestive track and swallowed the smaller ship, Mayhew and all. Incredulously Mayhew watched the dials of his control-board. Absolute spatial speed was reduced from thirty miles a second - - a little more than landing speed but still deadly in a crash - - to zero in a split second. External pressure built from the zero of deep space to seventeen pounds per square inch in the same instant. And Mayhew felt only a gentle cushioning effect, as if his spaceship was a toy and had been dropped from a height of a few feet on a feather bed.

He got up and, amazement stamped on his hard features, made his way to the airlock. He had already strapped on his blaster. He was going to see the alien after all. It seemed that the alien had an unexpected trick or two up his sleeve, but that didn't bother Mayhew much. He considered it a challenge. It was why he had not

fired on the alien ship: to an alien Mayhew would be no criminal. In the alien's civilization - - wherever it was - - Mayhew might have a chance to start life anew.

Mayhew worked the airlock tumblers. Suddenly he lurched forward, hitting his head against the inner door. He began to black out, and called himself a fool even as he did so. The alien ship was coming in to land, wasn't it? Mayhew's ship, with Mayhew, was inside the alien ship. Mayhew should have strapped himself into the blast hammock

He lurched again, struck his head again. Space became brilliantly white. In this eye-paining whiteness a tiny black dot appeared. The black irised open and swallowed the white brightness, swallowing Mayhew with it.

MAYHEW OPENED his eyes. Sunset, he thought. There was a red glow in the air, a sunset glow. He had forgotten how beautiful the colors on Earth could be.

Sunset? No. Mayhew looked around. He sat on the edge of a high bluff overlooking a ruined city. The sun was high in the sky, but a somber red color. It was a red sun. Mayhew sniffed at the air experimentally, then told himself that wasn't necessary. He'd

been breathing it, hadn't he? The air had a sweet smell, a smell of growing things. There were green plants on the bluff around Mayhew, and little star-shaped flowers wonderfully fragrant after the canned air of the spaceship, the air which was reprocessed over and over again and was breathable but hardly more than that.

Mayhew stood up and the long vista he saw to the horizon after the confinement of the spaceship made him giddy. The ruined city dominated the view, of course. It was spread out below the bluff on which Mayhew stood and beyond it was a river. Across the river were the stumps and skeletons of three bridges. The city itself was battered and smashed as if a legion of giants had trod across it. The tall once-graceful spires were bent and broken, the elevated streets were buckled and twisted. The city was a dead place, like a dozen dead places Mayhew had seen on a dozen once-civilized worlds.

"A pity, isn't it?"

Mayhew whirled at the sound of the voice. In his concentration he'd almost forgotten the alien. Behind him was the great cube of a spaceship. Now that Mayhew saw it stationary he realized how truly big it was. It was the largest spaceship Mayhew had ever seen, pos-

sibly half a mile across each way and half a mile high. "What have you got in there," Mayhew said, "an Army, equipment and all?"

"Your first thought is of violence, I see. That is a pity, too."

The alien was naked. His body was a slender, incredibly graceful trunk of pale blue flesh, like a tongue of flame. There were no limbs, yet the tongue-of-flame body seemed so fluid, so mobile, that Mayhew knew at once no limbs were necessary. Atop the blue flame of a body was a perfectly round sphere, featureless as the body was limbless. The sphere was not entirely opaque, however. There was the vague suggestion of translucency, as if the alien needed no eyes, no ears, no nose or mouth because his brain - - or whatever he used for a brain - - could focus these senses, and perhaps others that man did not possess, through the translucent shell of the head.

"Where's my spaceship?" Mayhew asked hostilely.

"Inside. In good shape, don't worry."

"How the hell do you talk my language?"

"I talk any language I wish."

"Where are you from?"

"Shouldn't we rather both be interested in this world we decided to land upon?"

"It's a dead world. I'm interested

in living things."

"Perhaps, if our interests differ, we had best each go his separate way."

"Sure," Mayhew said sarcastically, "that's why you captured my ship." Abruptly he clawed the blaster from his belt and leveled it with a steady hand at the alien. "Look," he said. "Maybe you have a few tricks up your sleeve I've never seen, but you don't scare me. If you're protoplasm, this blaster can hurt you. So let's you and me put our cards on the table where they can be seen. You especially. Why did you capture my ship? What do you want?"

The alien did not waver. The flame-tongue of a body seemed steady as a rock, and though no wind was blowing, it looked gracefully insubstantial, as though the slightest breeze would waft it about.

"I'll answer your questions," the alien said. Mayhew could see no mouth on the featureless face, no opening anyplace at all. He wondered where the voice was coming from. He had the vague idea that it was originating, at the alien's direction, inside his own head. "But first, Mr. Mayhew - - " here Mayhew started, for the alien knew his name - - "I would like to prove something to you. Fire that thing; go ahead, fire it."

"At you?" Mayhew wondered

what this bluff was all about.

"Certainly at me. Go ahead, I'm waiting."

"But - - "

"Shoot me!"

Mayhew frowned - - and pulled the trigger. The blaster leaped in his hand, butt slapping against his palm. The surge of raw energy flashed out at the alien - - and through him. Mayhew actually saw the beam strike rock on the other side.

"Now do you see?" the alien asked. "For all intents and purposes, I am quite invulnerable. Do we do things my way?"

For a moment Mayhew did not answer. Then he heard himself say one word: "Yeah."

"Splendid. To begin with, there is no Army in my ship. I am the sole inhabitant. The ship is so big because it is filled with sufficient automatic control machinery and supplies to ensure a perfectly safe journey for the balance of my life. Since my life-span is measurable in scores of thousands of your years, that means a big ship. Other questions?"

"What happened. I mean, did we crash?" The arrogance had gone from Mayhew's voice, to be replaced by an emotion to which he was thoroughly unaccustomed. That emotion was awe.

"No, we didn't crash. My ship

landed. You were not prepared for the instant deceleration. You died."

"WHAT?" gasped Mayhew. "You died. When I got to you your skull was split, you had a broken back, a broken pelvis, two broken limbs. You had lost almost all your blood. Fortunately for you - - "

"Died"

"Fortunately for you, I could repair or synthesize all of those things. You're all right now."

Mayhew felt himself gingerly. He felt whole. There were no aches or pains. He walked. He did not feel stiff. He looked at the alien and did not speak. What the alien said made no sense. Yet he believed.

"Look at this world," the alien said. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

Mayhew said it was beautiful.

"And the city?"

"Dead," said Mayhew.

"Dead," repeated the alien. "By its own hand. A civilization whose science outstripped its moral values by several generations: result, racial suicide. This is not the only - - "

"Yeah, I know," said Mayhew. "Practically all of them."

"In my own survey, Mr. Mayhew, ninety-seven worlds out of every hundred are destroyed by

their own hand. Self-destroyers. The reason is always the same. It never varies. Is your world going to perish by its own hand too, Mr. Mayhew?"

"What do you know about my world?" Mayhew felt a sudden intense longing to see Earth again, and wondered if the alien had implanted it.

"Planetary suicide," said the alien. "Reason: a failure on the moral level. Reason: an inability on the part of morality and social science and the general culture level to keep up with the physical sciences and a consequent ability for self-destruction without the moral fiber to curb it, to prevent war. Reason: a constant battle between science and theology, productive only of death."

"Listen," Mayhew said. "I - - " Obscurely, he was going to attempt a defense of distant Earth, but the alien silenced him with a dancing undulation of the flame-tongue of a body and went on:

"That is the case on ninety-seven of a hundred worlds. I haven't visited your world yet, Mr. Mayhew, although now we're hardly more than a thousand light years from it, is that correct?"

"Yeah," said Mayhew.

"I don't usually visit a world. I send an emissary, one of its own citizens. Are you listening, May-

hew? Do you understand?"

"You mean, you want me to go back to Earth for you - - with some kind of a message?"

"Precisely."

"I can't," said Mayhew.

"You must!"

"Can the message - - well, you know, will it cure them?"

"If it's given them in time."

It was cool there on the bluff above the dead city, but Mayhew began to sweat. He believed everything the alien said. There was no possibility of untruth. Somehow, with utmost finality, Mayhew could sense that. Yet what could he do? To return to Earth would mean returning to lifelong imprisonment.

"I'm an escaped convict," Mayhew said flatly, tonelessly. "They'll put me in prison for life if I go back there."

"Foolish man, not with the gift I give you!"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you believe everything I say?"

"Yeah," Mayhew said promptly. He meant it.

"In precisely the same way, they will believe you. If you return in time with the gift I will give you, you can save your human race from suicide. You understand that, don't you?"

"If - - if I don't go back there

with your message they're going to kill themselves off, like this world and all the others?"

"Yes. Overwhelming pride in their glorious attainment, Mr. Mayhew. Your ancient Greeks called it *hubris*, I believe. Pride in their science. Refusal to slow down, to let their morality catch up, to heed the word of their own theology."

"What can I do?"

"Mr. Mayhew, did you ever hear of the music of the spheres?"

"I - - yeah, I think so. Some kind of crazy legend about celestial music made by all the stars and planets in their motion through the firmament. The most beautiful music in the universe. Heavenly music. Divine. It sure sounds corny."

"Corny, Mayhew? The legend of the Music of the Spheres can be found in almost all your sub-cultures, can't it? Like your universal legend of a flood?"

"If you say so."

"I tell you, Mr. Mayhew, the Music of the Spheres is the message of salvation, if only you can understand in time, if only your people can."

"I don't get it."

THE ALIEN laughed for the first time. It was a simple laugh, melodious, at once friendly

and serene. "Remember, I said an unresolved conflict between theology and science means destruction. This is what has happened on ninety-seven of every hundred habitable worlds throughout the galaxy. Needless to say, it is the rule, not the exception."

"But what can I do?"

"The Music of the Spheres exists, Mr. Mayhew. It is known to your people as it is known to all scientific races. The Music of the Spheres is its theological name, but it has a scientific name as well. Under that name you are familiar with it. Every spaceman must be. The scientific name for the Music of the Spheres, Mr. Mayhew, is radio astronomy."

"Radio astronomy!" gasped Mayhew.

"Certainly. Radio astronomy."

Mayhew thought: hell, yeah, I'm familiar with it. Radio astronomy. With it you picked up radio beams from stars you couldn't see. Invisible stars, hidden behind dust clouds, in nebulae, in glowing swarms too far and too close-packed for a telescope to separate. Or dead stars which emitted no light but gave off radio waves. Radio astronomy, Mayhew knew, had been known on Earth for hundreds of years. Since the middle third of the twentieth century, as a matter of fact. Yet what had

radio astronomy to do with this alien's message - - a message which could save Earth from the self-destruction that seemed the rule of the galaxy?

"What has radio astronomy got to do with the Music of the Spheres?" Mayhew asked.

The alien said: "They are one and the same thing. On ninety-seven out of every hundred worlds, Mr. Mayhew, the electro-magnetic signals of the radio-telescopes are regarded simply as radio waves. But on three worlds out of every hundred - - on the worlds which will survive and put an end to internal strife - - the message of the radio waves can be read. I will give you the ability to read this message, and you will bring that ability back to your people. You will bring them - - the Music of the Spheres."

"It's actually some kind of message?"

"Precisely, Mr. Mayhew. As I have said - - theology and science. No longer making war on one another, but wedding eternally in the Music of the Spheres. Or, to put it another way the Music of the Spheres - - a product of radio astronomy, one of your most advanced sciences - - for once and all time will establish as true the tenets of your most profound theology. You understand?"

Mayhew said: "I guess I'm kind of out of my depth."

"You won't be, once you see for yourself. Are you ready?"

"Yeah," said Mayhew. But he looked doubtful.

"Then come."

The alien turned, went to the enormous spaceship. As he approached it a port appeared magically in the side. A ramp materialized. With Mayhew the alien went up it and inside the ship. The ramp disappeared. The port closed. There seemed to be no seam in the hull of the cube-shaped ship.

THE MACHINERY was elaborate, labyrinthine. It meant almost nothing to Mayhew. He saw his own small spaceship, nestled in a cocoon-like cradle. He made no comment. They passed it in silence and entered a small chamber. Mayhew recognized the radio astronomy equipment. It was something he could understand.

"Put on the earphones," said the alien.

Mayhew did so. At first he heard nothing, then the alien pressed a switch. The familiar beeps filled his ears.

"You hear it?"

"Sure. Radio astronomy. Sixty cycles, isn't it? The commonest of wavelengths. The radio astronomy sound of hydrogen, the com-

monest element in the universe. So what?"

"That is as you have always heard it. That is as ninety-seven out of every hundred worlds hear it - - and perish. But the remaining three . . . Listen." Another switch was pressed.

And Mayhew heard.

All at once his face went rapt. His eyes widened. Tears stood in them, rolled down his cheeks. A radiant smile lit up his hard, cynical face and he fell on his knees before the alien. The tongue-of-flame-body wavered in embarrassment and Mayhew climbed to his feet.

"Please," the alien said. "I am not who you think. I only hear the message, as you do. You understand?"

"Yes!" cried Mayhew tremulously. "Yes, yes, yes!"

"And you will take it back to your people? They can study this single receiver and duplicate it cheaply enough."

Mayhew said that he would do it. He was trembling with emotion, for he had heard - - and understood - - the music. The Music of the Spheres. An enormous wave of kindness and altruism engulfed him. He wanted to do things for people, to spend his life helping them, to serve mankind . . .

In a dreamlike trance, Mayhew

watched as his small spaceship was disgorged by the larger one. He went outside with the alien. They stood together for a moment, staring down at the dead city.

"In the proud, cynical perfection of their upstart science," said the alien, "if a world can see lucidly and for all times with the very tools of their science that their pride as creators and artificers is one and the same as the humility and self-effacement of their theology . . ."

"Yes," said Mayhew. He understood. His face was still raptly serene. He took his earphones and entered his ship. A moment later he blasted off.

The alien stood until the red sun went down, gazing across the ruins of the city. Here, he thought wearily, he had been too late. Too late with the word. And - - for Mayhew's Earth? He did not know. He had his hope only: that he was in time.

But it was up to the Earthman Mayhew. He knew that. He sighed, returning to his big cube-shaped spaceship with a gentle burning motion. A thousand light years - - that was the journey Mayhew had to make. And with so many worlds to visit, the alien allowed himself only one try at each. It was Mayhew for Earth - - or Earth was lost.

A thousand light years. With a ship such as Mayhew's, the chances of surviving the journey were exactly one in two. On the way out, Mayhew had been lucky. The alien wondered if he would be equally lucky on the way back. He did not know. He was not omniscient. If Mayhew made it, Earth would survive. If the odds of one chance in two worked against Mayhew somewhere in the depths of interstellar space - - in fiery collision with an unseen dark star or heat-destruction in a suddenly engulfing nebula or failure of the subspace drive - - then Earth would perish.

The alien went to the radio cabin and tuned in the instrument. He had not heard his radio astron-

omy all day, and he longed for it. The music swelled. Even by itself it was the most profoundly beautiful sound in all creation, that ever was and ever would be. It was at once glorious and humble. It was God and creature and the starry universe. And the words - - the words which were the same for all stellar languages, the simple words chanted to the music of the radio astronomy, the Music of the Spheres, the words so simply and so obvious and believed at once and for all time, the words that could save a world . . .

Would Mayhew bring them back to Earth - - or perish trying?

The ethereally beautiful words were: *LOVE THY NEIGHBOR.*
THE END



The Circling Eye



THE INK is hardly dry on the elaborate plans for the Satellite which should be shot into the Heavens within the next few years, when men already are drawing up detailed plans for the construction of a larger version to house a miniature television transmitting station!

Weathermen believe that if men could observe the Earth from a height of two hundred miles with regularity, it would be a simple matter to give exact, pin-pointed weather prognostications.

This satellite would be little larg-

er than the one abuilding. Perhaps it would be five feet in diameter, studded with Solar absorption cells to provide power. Completely self-contained and with a long-lived TV camera within, automatic equipment sighting on the Sun would keep the instrument properly oriented.

While fine detail could not be noted, that would be no disadvantage. Simply the progress of cloud formations would convey the necessary information. What the third step in this satellite race would be is not hard to guess!



"If we take these suits off we'll live about an hour. Okay?"

Letters

from the Readers

ORCHIDS FOR ED

Dear Bill:

You were right! I mean about THUNDER WORLD when you said it is one heck of a fine novel. It had all the qualities that make a good sf adventure yarn - - action galore, suspense, and most of all, a well-worked out plot. One of the main reasons space opera is frowned upon by some is because of the lack of that last quality. Don't give Ed Hamilton one orchid - - give him a dozen!

Adam Chase has clicked again. First it was with THE FINAL QUARRY (May 1956 issue) and now it is with THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET in the July issue. Chase also has that quality of writing in action without ruining the rest of the story. When can we expect a novel from this boy?

The shorts were all good especially Alex Blade's FLIGHT OF THE ARK II. A close runner-up was SPACE TRAVELER'S REVENGE. It was quite amusing. JASON AND THE MAKER was

short but nicely written.

The cover for July in my humble opinion was another Rognan masterpiece. I think it even excels Malcolm Smith's job for the June IMAGINATION. Matter of fact, of all the sf magazines on sale this month, TALES ranks second best!

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Ave
Bronx 56, N. Y.

Now you have us puzzled, Marty. If the July TALES cover was second best - - what was the top cover of the month? . . . We'll ask Adam Chase what his plans are for a long cover story. We have a hunch the lad will surprise us! with

BEST FOR ALL

Dear Bill Hamling:

While I haven't read the July issue as yet I did want to take time to write this letter. I've never written to a science fiction magazine before, but in the case of TALES I thought I better so you'd know I enjoy your magazine more than

any other in the field. I could "except" IMAGINATION, but *Madge* is not always available on the stands here so I find it hard to rank your companion magazine.

You now have my subscription to TALES (I received the free book THIS ISLAND EARTH) and I'll shortly subscribe to *Madge* too.

Keep the stories as tantalizing as they've been in the past!

Albert Kozeliski

409 6th St., West
Roundup, Montana

We can't explain why MADGE doesn't appear regularly in your area, Al, unless it's just that you get to the stands too late for your copy! However, a subscription will guarantee you a steady supply of top-flight science fiction, so send in for MADGE, by all means! - - And that goes for the rest of you readers. Why not subscribe to both MADGE and TALES today . . . You can use the coupon on page 130 for both magazines by checking offer "B" and pencilling a note on the margin: "For Madge & Tales". You'll get two free books for your library while you're at it! . . . with

TALES ANOTHER MADGE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've been reading TALES from its birth to the present, and I've received many hours of reading pleasure from the magazine. First of all I enjoyed the humor stories by Robert Bloch, and I personally feel one stf magazine should be devoted to the "light side".

Then TALES changed into what I feared it would become - - another

MADGE. Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing the matter with IMAGINATION, but to tell the truth I hoped TALES would continue to offer humorous material. How about coming through in this regard?

In the July issue, THUNDER WORLD by Edmond Hamilton was excellent. Granger's FIELD TRIP shows this boy is really working hard to get to the top. The balance of the yarns, in order of preference: THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET, FLIGHT OF THE ARK II, SPACE TRAVELER'S REVENGE, and JASON AND THE MAKER. Speaking of the latter story, by Paul Fairman, I note Paul has been doing quite a bit of work for AMAZING and FANTASTIC. How about getting him to do more stories for MADGE and TALES?

The cover by Rognan was superlative, and the interior illos were good. You're doing a fine job.

Michael Deckinger

85 Locust Ave.

Millburn, N. J.

The change last year in TALES to what you call "another MADGE" was indeed deliberate on our part. With TALES and MADGE we have in effect a monthly science fiction magazine, but with separate titles. This allows each issue to enjoy a slightly longer on sale period and from the editorial end allows us to give each book a slightly different set of departments - - like FANDORA'S BOX in MADGE and SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE in TALES. As to Paul Fairman, we've got a number of Fairman stories on tap right now, and we'll be sure and have more for the future! . . with

FEAST AND FAMINE

Dear Ed:

This is the second letter I've written to an stf magazine, the first having gone to Ray Palmer and his **OTHER WORLDS**.

This time I have some things to take exception with, and as a science fiction reader from the days of Hugo Gernsback, I feel qualified to throw a rock or two.

Perhaps you feel compelled to run certain stories because of letters from such fans as Janice Jacobsen (her letter in the July issue). Janice apparently has self-stated "immature and juvenile" tastes, preferring the space opera along with (shades of A. Hyatt Verrill!) the "vintage stuff".

I am not an "old, sophisticated *mature* reader," but *am* an omnivorous reader of *all* science fiction available. I can only wish my tastes were as simple as Janice's - - then I would not have to serve as a filter for so much "tripe" to come on some occasional "vintage" stories.

On second thought, I am not going to offend your sensibilities further by trying to tell you what is right and wrong with your magazine, **TALES**, as I am sure you are aware of both.

I shall continue to read **TALES**, as I do all the others, and, if you can assure me I'll get it faster via subscription than I can by purchasing it on the stands, I'll fill out the sub coupon and send it in!



"Hey, Charlie, have a look at these stalactites!"

In brief, lest you doubt I read July's offerings, here are my opinions: Cover—tell Rogan to stick closer to the story in the future; but I did like the painting! THUNDER WORLD—Hamilton was good, but this writer can do much better! THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET—Chase turned out what to me is good filler material. FLIGHT OF THE ARK II—Alex Blade wasted a good theme on a short story, should have been longer. Alex, incidentally, can write! All the other stories—how come? Cartoons and features - - fine, enjoyed all of them!

Reuben T. Hepner
P. O. Box 404
Culver City, Calif.

First off, yes, we can guarantee you'll get your subscription copy ahead of newsstand publication. Subscribers' copies are mailed (flat, in heavy protecting envelopes) several weeks in advance of nationwide on sale date. So shoot in the sub! . . . Seems to us this discussion of "space opera" versus "vintage stuff" is leading all concerned into something of a semantic labyrinth. Personally we consider the two synonymous! Part of the interest of the bygone days of the field lay in the glamour of adventure on other worlds in other times—in essence, the space opera. Janice, in her letter said much the same thing. As we see it, too many writers (due to preferences of some editors) got away from producing the "vintage" type of story and started turning out reams of psychological junk labelled science fiction. If you've had to act as a filter—there's the reason! At

the risk of being repetitious, we'll say again that both MADGE and TALES refuse to go high-brow with the lofty type of story one can enjoy only in an ivory tower. We don't live in any ivory tower and we make no pretense about it! We're inclined to believe you feel the same way too. wth

DANDER NOT UP!

Dear Bill Hamling:

Got my copy of the July issue of TALES yesterday and have just finished reading it—and I mean everything in the issue. When I read a magazine I squeeze every bit of interest out of it, believe me!

I liked the July issue, and I'll even go so far as to say it's one of the best thus far. The cover was good, but no better than that on the May issue. Who's complaining?

THUNDER WORLD was a real dilly of a story and I don't mean maybe. Plenty of suspense and action. FIELD TRIP was also good, as was THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET. Perhaps even better were SPACE TRAVELER'S REVENGE and FLIGHT OF THE ARK II. For a short bit of whimsy I enjoyed JASON AND THE MAKER.

The two-color artwork is fine, and the cartoons are always especially good. Keep up the pace and you'll become the No. 1 magazine in the business—hold on, I can just see the readers holler: "TALES is already No. 1!"—Don't get your dander up, gang, I think so too—and here's my subscription to prove it!

Larry E. Carroll
Gen. Del.

Goodrich, Texas
As the man said, "actions speak louder than words" so your sub is welcomed. That's the kind of action an editor likes—so how about YOU wielding the pen on a \$3 check for 12 issues and accompany it with YOUR letter! with

NEW BREED OF MAN

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The July issue of TALES was better than ever. THUNDER WORLD by Ed Hamilton was excellent—particularly since I enjoy plenty of action and adventure.

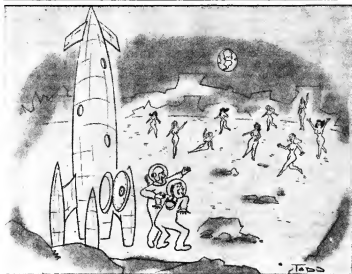
In addition to an entertaining story, THUNDER WORLD pointed up the fact that space travel will

undoubtedly produce a new breed of men. It stands to reason that the physical hardships of alien worlds will condition men into a much tougher species. Man will have to adapt himself to alien environments, and THUNDER WORLD used the idea to good advantage.

The rest of the stories in the issue were quite good also.

TALES' features are always enjoyable, and the cartoons fulfill my liking for humor. Keep them coming!

I agree with the consensus of reader opinion. Both MADGE and TALES are gaining leadership of all science fiction magazines. I'd say that you are doing your share



"This is the place I was telling you about!"

on the editorial end, and it's up to us readers to let you know you have our support!

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N

1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Cal.

The physical conditioning of men for outer space travel is well recognized by our government; the department of SPACE MEDICINE is busily engaged in this very subject, and science is doing everything possible to make it easier for men who will one day soon take the "long walk" into deep space. Which points up the fact that a good action story can also provide more than its share of food for thought! We aim to provide both
..... with

WORD FROM DOWN UNDER

Dear Bill:

The action-adventure policy of TALES is ok by me! Science fiction has been in an uninspired rut for quite a few years, and a return to the Burroughs - John Carter school may be just the thing needed to give science fiction a badly needed

shot in the arm.

For example, Dwight Swain's ENEMY OF THE QUA in the March issue, and Chandler's LATE ARRIVAL were two fine yarns. I was particularly interested in the Chandler story since Bert had told me about the yarn (before it saw print) the last time he passed this way. Bert's travels usually take him by way of Western Australia, and we always have a good gabfest whenever he hits this part of the world.

Top marks go to Malcolm Smith, one of your best cover artists.

I'd like to let my American fan-friends know that my address is now permanent, so any letters will be acknowledged and appreciated.

Roger Dard
Box S1387

G. P. O. Perth
Western Australia

Good to hear from you, Roger. And the next time A. Bertram Chandler passes through, say hello for us—and let him know we're looking for new stories by him! . . . Which winds up shop for this issue
..... with

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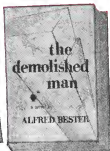
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